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CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Old Vic Drama

Theatre of Two Decades

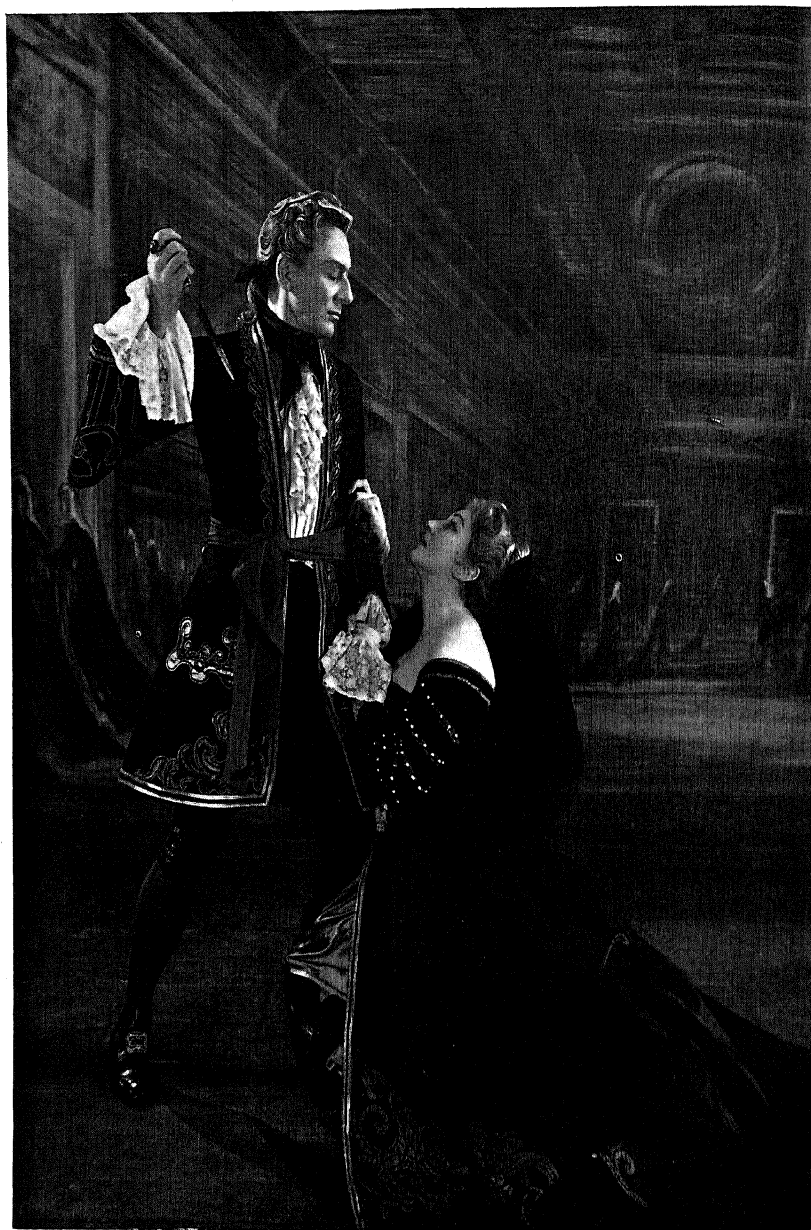
Paul Rogers

Gilbert and Sullivan Opera

Contemporary Ballet

The Art of Ballet

Ballet Renaissance



Venice Preserv'd, Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, 1953. John Gielgud as Jaffier and Eileen Herlie as Belvidera. Angus McBean

CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

1953–1956

by

Audrey Williamson

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

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A. W.

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I

CORONATION FANFARE

Henry VIII

THE Coronation was greeted characteristically by the English theatre with a trumpeting flourish of revivals and historical plays. Ours is the theatre of the actor and producer, not the playwright, and while our Eliots and Frys failed to spread their wings as newly-fledged Elizabethans, our Gielguds and Guthries set a blaze to the occasion and the lesser-known classical repertoire.

Tyrone Guthrie, our most flamboyant producer, led a field which may aptly be termed the Field of the Cloth of Gold with a dazzling production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, which opened at the Old Vic on 6th May, 1953, a month before the Coronation, in a Gala performance attended by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. Its pageantry, in Tanya Moiseiwitsch's banner-tossed, sunlit yellow designs, engulfed the Vic apron stage and Guthrie made full use of the topical humours of the text. The three onlookers at the Coronation of Anne Boleyn, munching Tudor sandwiches and spotting the Earl Marshal, had a contemporary ring, and at the christening of the Princess Elizabeth which ends this play few can have failed to be moved by the sense of occasion. Cranmer's speech holds a promise and benediction for the reign to be:

In her days, every man shall eat in safety
Under his own vine what he plants; and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours.

It is Guthrie's supreme virtue that he can give character and life to a chronicle which reads undramatically, but one has only to compare it with certain modern plays on Tudor history to realise that Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* is something much more than a Tudor pageant. It is a play with a sense of character and the political background to events which springs from a mind close to the period, moving (as the Elizabethan theatre did) within at least the outer orbit of the Court, and vividly conscious of the graft, drive for power and

dangerous intertwining of personal ambition and public necessity behind the character and actions of its leading figures.

Scenes such as Katharine's trial, Wolsey's downfall, the King's nervous verbal play with Cranmer while waiting for the birth of the kingdom's desperately needed heir, his later challenge of the Bishop of Winchester's guile in the Council Chamber—these show the master hand in stage performance, and are as unmistakably Shakespeare's as Katharine's, Wolsey's, Buckingham's and Cranmer's great speeches. Whether Shakespeare "worked over" existing dramatic material (by Fletcher or another) or not, and however much, as in his later romances, he was inevitably influenced in his construction by the changing scenic fashion towards the masque and the pageant, his stage genius, unique in his time, flashes out in the theatre, and his characters are three-dimensional in a sense unknown to his fellow dramatists, and unchallenged in any modern period drama.

Wolsey, most secular of prelates, man of brain and iron, sensuality and ambition, an opportunist in full flush of success and dizzy defeat, is still capable of stirrings of conscience from some deep early intuition, so that when the fall comes he can draw on the tattered dignity of fundamental conviction, feel anew the half-forgotten spiritual aspirations of his calling, and face death and disgrace with a profound and candid sense of retribution, and a grief which springs not from rancour at his enemies, but rather from a bitter realisation of his own wasted spiritual life and opportunities.

What other dramatist has given us in one play not only this Wolsey-in-the-round but also this Katharine, Henry, Cranmer, Gardiner and humble porters of the Christening scene? Only Shakespeare in his time revivifies his historical characters with such a profusive hand; no play of Shakespeare's is a one-man play, not even *Hamlet*, and he was as incapable of producing a *Tamburlaine the Great* as Marlowe a *King Lear* or *Twelfth Night*.

Henry VIII is the titular figure because the play is a historical chronicle, a picture of a period still alive in the minds of Shakespeare's oldest contemporaries and identified with its reigning king, who was father to the great Queen whose own reign had come to look, to the early Jacobeans, like a golden age now declining. It is often stated for these reasons that Shakespeare and the later Tudor chroniclers from whom he drew his material blatantly "whitewashed" the real Henry

and his central portrait as a result lacks colour. The performances of Henry given in our time by Anthony Quayle and Paul Rogers should alone invalidate this theory, apart from a closer study of history than that from which the popular gross figure of Henry is drawn. Henry, it must be remembered, at the period of Shakespeare's play was still a man in full vigour (he had been married to Katharine of Aragon, his elder brother's widow, for political reasons at the age of fifteen), still to the English people the golden Prince Hal whose athletic prowess and Midas "common touch" had given the new Tudor dynasty a popularity it had never achieved in the time of that shrewd, secret adventurer, his father, Henry VII. Through his mother, Elizabeth of York, he carried the blood of the Plantagenets and Yorkists, still to many Englishmen the true blood royal of England, and like his daughter Elizabeth he inherited many qualities of his grandfather, the great King Edward IV. Like Edward, he was a natural statesman betrayed by growing indolence and his passion for women; but actually at this time and later he was as much romantic as lascivious, grossness had not blurred the manhood, and his attachment for Anne Boleyn, sustained without gratification over a period of years, was in many ways naïve and sentimental, as well as lashed (as all his later marriages were lashed) by the desperate need for an heir to strengthen a by no means stable dynasty; for this had been, only one generation before, the fruit of usurpation and continually challenged from its foundation.

Shakespeare, closer to these things and the problems of monarchy than ourselves, did not make the common mistake of underrating either the pressure of genuine romance or of genuine dynastic responsibility in Henry, and looked at the King in his time and uninfluenced by the degeneration of years afterwards. At the same time it is surprising how much of the true character emerges—the flash of cruelty in rage, the ebullience, the despotism, the geniality that can be ripped by self-interest. If the eye is friendlier than our own, what it sees is still nearer to the real Henry VIII than the modern caricature to which even some historians still cling.

The play's fault is looseness of construction; planned as a chronicle with opportunities for pageantry, it lacks dramatic "shape" while touching drama in individual scenes. By the standards of his earlier histories these scenes are too spaced-out; this means the task of keeping

the action flowing and "alive" depends largely on the producer, and if Guthrie was occasionally naughty in his bid for laughs, his production had the advantage of bringing out the salient action, drama and conflict of character, and giving even to the swirling processions an undercurrent of humanity. He used the various stage levels of his permanent setting finely, and only at the christening abused the use of the apron stage to the extent of seriously blocking the view of the stalls audience with groups of attendants.

A graver charge was that by insisting on a cynical view of Wolsey's attitude in disgrace, and trying to keep before us to the last the extradesman's son and opportunist, bitter in defeat, he went dead against Shakespeare's own lines and set an impossible task for the actor. Alexander Knox in spite of this gave the scene strength of passion and a bitterness that was not unmoving, and earlier he forcefully established the Cardinal in his materialism and sense of power, with an outward geniality playing on his master's ribald humour and an irony incisively his own.

Leo Genn, like Knox returning to the Old Vic after a long period in films, gave Buckingham a grave, urbane sympathy with a voice like the pile of black velvet (afterwards on tour the part was characterised quite differently by Robert Eddison; grey-bearded in dignity after Genn's younger, darkly handsome courtier, but with equal beauty of elocution in Buckingham's gentle and noble farewell). Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies' Katharine also brought one of our most distinguished emotional actresses back to the London stage after an absence, and was exquisitely played throughout, with an anguish which became attenuated to the most finely-spun of tragic threads in the death scene, where she seemed literally to fade out of life, the celestial vision (tactfully omitted by Guthrie) mirrored in her drawn face and preternaturally large, tear-filled eyes. She was much helped in this scene by the delicate playing of Wolfe Morris as the faithful Griffiths, one of the rewarding small perfections of Shakespeare if the actor can realise them. The Cranmer, too, was excellently played by William Squire, a young actor with a sardonic touch who spoke the Christening scene speech with a gentleness that was both sweet and raptly prophetic.

Perhaps the most remarkable performance was that of Henry by Paul Rogers. This lusty young King with the red-gold beard combined the Tudor ruthlessness with the Plantagenet charm and, with a

fine play of facial expression, made the man at times moving in his mixture of genuine conscience and humbug. The rise of Rogers, after several years' solid hard work, showed the Old Vic still capable of creating its own star material. His Shylock and white-hot Cassius, earlier in the season, had already proved his range and placed him at the pinnacle of our younger actors.

Henry VIII marked the end of an Old Vic era under Hugh Hunt. The régime had had its failures and successes, but ended triumphantly with a packed season which included Claire Bloom's gravely beautiful, young and ardent Juliet, an exciting production of *Julius Cæsar* by Hugh Hunt, and an outstanding revival of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* in which Robert Donat, exquisite in elocution and spiritual integrity, made a welcome return to the stage as Becket, and Robert Helpmann a highly successful début as stage producer.

Henry VI, Parts I, II and III

While Bluff King Hal made a royal progress through the provinces, the Old Vic Theatre was occupied by his saintlier and even more rarely played predecessor, King Henry VI. The Birmingham Repertory Company had staged Part III of this chronicle at the Old Vic the previous summer, with Paul Daneman, one of their particular white hopes, as a long-nosed Richard of Gloucester in the Olivier tradition of make-up but with an eloquence of his own. This was so highly successful that they now added Parts I and II and brought all three plays, with largely the same cast, to London.

Theatregoers and critics found to their surprise that that schoolboy's nightmare, the Wars of the Roses, can fire the modern stage, and that generations of scholars can be woefully wrong in their judgment of a play's actable qualities. Part I, it is true, is tentative Shakespeare, although it has its fine scenes, even humour, the characters and conflicts are poised for development, and in the Birmingham production a fiery and at moments moving performance by the young actress, Nancie Jackson, made even the Elizabethan picture of Joan of Arc (for which Shakespeare himself, of course, could not be held directly responsible) at least dramatically compelling in the theatre. Indeed, in spite of the English taunts, the character emerges as historically accurate in details; the recognition of the Dauphin is identical in Shakespeare,

Shaw and Anouilh, and it is not until Joan's capture and unmasking at the scurrilously distorted trial that the witchcraft aspect appears openly in the girl's deeds and emotions.

In the next two plays we see Shakespeare, the master, in growing control of his craft, with a Richard of Gloucester already in vivid ironic progress towards *Richard III*. The producer, Douglas Seale, pointed this by ending the cycle with Richard's opening soliloquy from the later play, delivered from the throne just vacated by his brother Edward IV, in a fading twilight that gradually masked him, and all the proud tossing emblems of York—the bannered sun—from our sight. It is not possible to imagine a more striking illustration of:

Now is the winter of our discontent,
Made glorious summer by this sun of York;

or of the absolute continuity of historical action that flows through these Shakespearean chronicles of the last kings of the Middle Ages, from Richard II to Richard III; for Seale also established the dynastic line in his opening to Part I, a memorable group emerging from pitch blackness to show the barons of the realm standing silently around the bier of King Henry V, while a voice narrated the haunting final Chorus of that play, mourning the "star of England":

Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd king
Of France and England, did this king succeed . . .

The light is now full, the King's uncles and barons surge to life, and we are suddenly head-on into *Henry VI*, with Bedford's outset challenge to all the study-huggers who doubt the hand of Shakespeare in these plays:

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night,
Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky . . .

The crystal shimmer may be intermittent in the poetry, but it is there; and the drama shapes itself, as always with Shakespeare, through individual characters—the haughty Warwick, ambitious but time-biding York, treacherous Somerset; the saint-like King, weak in government and guile, strong in loyalties and devotion; the "high-flying", ill-fated Suffolk, "Good Duke" Humphrey and poisonous Cardinal with his shocking death; the Queen young in pride and beauty

transformed to the middle-aged ferocity of the She-Wolf in defence of helpless husband and displaced heir; the young Richard of Gloucester, new-fledged in evil and a joyous ironic sense of his own ambition, clutching at a crown still distant but glitteringly within his grasp:

Tut, were it further off, I'll pluck it down!

The period is less overlaid with Tudor propaganda than the reign of Richard III and the *Henry VI* plays have altogether a stronger sense of history, certain scenes being closely followed from the contemporary chronicles and leaping into dramatic picture, as it were, from the monkish page. Some of it is compressed with a certain naïve charm, typical of the Elizabethan stage way with history: months of legal negotiation on marriage or state succession being packed into a brief passage of dialogue between the principal figures, as when York relinquishes his claim to the throne until Henry's death. Shakespeare missed a famous dramatic scene here, when York, after storming into the Palace at Westminster, placed his hand on the throne to mount it but was stopped by the resentful silence of his own jealous followers, including Warwick. But it is one of the rare occasions when history, dramatically, betters Shakespeare, and remarkably throughout these three plays he has moulded and telescoped events into theatrical form, never basically twisting the historical shape of the time or his characters; for one of the strengths of the chronicles is his preservation of the human spirit which retains our sympathy, at times, for the actors on both sides of the conflict.

The spirited young Margaret, touchingly torn by disappointment, impatience and hurt humiliation in comparing her saintly, poverty-stricken husband with the handsome Suffolk who had wooed her on his behalf, is established as something more than She-Wolf: a woman cruel to her enemies and ambitious, but fighting for friends and dependants as much as herself, and capable of suffering as well as high courage. York, whom even Sir Thomas More in his virulently misinformed *Life* of his son, Richard III, describes as "a noble manne and a mightie", plots for the throne, though warily, from the first play. "I believe he was not meant in the play to be a very attractive or sympathetic character," wrote the producer after these Old Vic performances, "but to us today he seems by no means the villain

Shakespeare intended. Surely anyone opposing the reigning monarch must have been suspect in Elizabeth's day?"

The truth is that Shakespeare, the great dramatist, could not circumvent either his own tolerant sense of humanity or his historical facts, and his Duke of York, "reaching the moon" and planned, it would seem, as the ambitious rebel plotting his way to the throne, very soon emerges as a character with an undeniably strong genealogical claim, remarkable forbearance (*vide* that easy acquiescence to Henry's retaining the throne, at a moment when the Yorkists had the power to enforce his abdication) and deep family devotion. In the great and terrible scene in the third play, when Margaret mocks him with the death of his child and crowns him with a paper crown before killing him, he becomes a tragic figure and achieves a stature and sympathy which colour our whole remembrance of the character; right on, in fact, into *Richard III* when the scene and his speech are recalled.

Rutland, the murdered child, was in fact York's second son, seventeen years old, and was killed in the Battle of Wakefield—though possibly by Clifford in flight—at which his father also met his death. His reduction to the status of youngest child, with tutor, the pitiable and innocent object of Clifford's revenge for his own father's death at Yorkist hands, is one of Shakespeare's strokes of dramatic genius, not only infusing pathos into the chronicle and substantiating the theme, which he has underlined throughout, of the human disaster and growing vindictiveness of civil war, but allowing him to build up the far more interesting character of Richard as the more active participant in his father's bid for a throne.

Richard in fact was the youngest of York's sons, ten years his brother Edward IV's junior and eight years old at the time of his father's death. If the producer took both Shakespeare and history seriously he would be forced to show Richard fighting in the first Battle of St. Albans at the age of scarcely three years (Edgar Wreford, who played Richard in the Birmingham trilogy, might be described in this case as a very lusty and well-grown infant). But Shakespeare, though he had a finer sense than is generally imagined of the fundamental issues of history, knew just when dramatic licence could be used to make the period or his characters alive, and could fling chronology aside with a splendid gesture at will. His mistakes in Richard were the mistakes of his Tudor sources, mainly Hall who followed

(and embellished) More; but no one can deny that the crooked More-Hall picture of Richard is nevertheless abundantly dramatic, especially to minds as obsessed with the Machiavellian villain as those of Shakespeare and the Renaissance world (Richard's reference to the "murderous Machiavel" is an anachronism that often passes unnoticed, but it is revealing).

Shakespeare in the play of *Richard III* had only Tudor propaganda to draw on; his sense of humour (and his Richard is in part a comedy-villain, as Sir Laurence Olivier is not the first actor to realise) outraged his sense of human reality, and the monster he drew cannot have been accepted as a credible human being even in his own day (even More peppers his old wives' tales with personal doubts). Yet here also his events are historical, only seen as in a mirror distorted, with a biased twist against Richard: the truth in reverse, as it were, and sometimes too blatantly so, as in the instances of Richard's supposed hypocrisy. But against the Yorkists of the previous two reigns the Tudors were less vigilant: Richard, Duke of York, and Edward, his son, were great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather of Elizabeth, who like her father Henry VIII liked to base her dynastic claim on Plantagenet as well as the more questionable Tudor descent. It was from the "side-issue", Edward's young brother Richard, that Henry Tudor seized the throne, and Richard only who must be defamed to make that usurpation ("by conquest", as Henry of Richmond's own proclamation admitted) seem justifiable.

It is interesting, therefore, to see that although still highly coloured by the historical angle given in Shakespeare's time to Richard's later reign, his portrait of Richard in the *Henry VI* plays, where there was more contemporary material available, is lighter and more vivid in touch, less inhuman, and closer to historical character. Richard's supreme courage, never denied by the Tudor historians (it was legendary and almost in living memory), is a strong element in *Richard III*; but there it is the courage of a trapped fiend, whereas here it has a youthful alacrity and selflessness, backed by a strong sense of family unity. "Our house" or "our race" are phrases more than once on the lips of Shakespeare's Richard, and his pride in his father, the Duke of York, is unforced and wholly admirable. (There seems some historical basis for this: although Richard only knew his father as a child, and then, owing to the troubled times, probably only

intermittently, he appears from his letters when King to have cherished a high regard and attachment for him. His loyalty to his brother Edward throughout his reign was unshakable.)

"I cannot joy, until I be resolv'd, where our right valiant father is become"—"Methinks 'tis prize enough to be his son": in such lines pride, even affection, glow. "Richard hath best deserv'd of all my sons", says York, on his part, after St. Albans; and at the story of his father's death Richard shows genuine grief, although the expression of it is brilliantly characteristic:

I cannot weep; for all my body's moisture
Scarce serves to quench my furnace-burning heart:
Nor can my tongue unload my heart's great burden. . . .

To weep is to make less the depth of grief:
Tears, then, for babes; blows and revenge for me!
Richard, I bear thy name; I'll venge thy death,
Or die renowned by attempting it.

It is, of course, impossible to doubt that the same hand fashioned the Richard in the trilogy and the Richard of the later play; and it is possible the *Henry VI* Richard was revised after *Richard III* itself had been written and proved successful. For to my mind, Parts II and III of *Henry VI* are better plays, psychologically, dramatically and historically, than *Richard III*, where melodrama is more pronounced; and if it comes to poetry and language there is little to choose between them. Certainly, although less dominating and stage-stealing a rôle, the Richard of *Henry VI* is the more finely written and believable part and the opportunities for the actor, although more isolated, are not less exciting. The glittering irony and wit are already there; the ambition vaults; and his soliloquies of self-revelation so patently surpass that at the opening of *Richard III* that their best passages and lines are now habitually transported bodily by the actor into the play of *Richard III*. But torn out of context they have not the same illustrative power: the Richard of *Henry VI* is a supreme build-up to the larger-scale but less complex and dramatically vivid Richard of the titular play. Certainly a complete picture of the character cannot possibly be gauged without reference to the earlier plays, which show by their nature the roots of violence planted by the increasing bitterness of civil war, and in the case of Richard's own character suggest most

clearly, in addition, the moral defiance bred by consciousness of his deformity:

Well, say there is no kingdom, then, for Richard;
 What other pleasure can the world afford?
 I'll make my heaven in a lady's lap,
 And deck my body in gay ornaments,
 And witch sweet ladies with my words and looks.
 O miserable thought! and more unlikely
 Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns!
 Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb. . . .

The theme is frustration, from which lust for power often springs; and the loneliness of Richard is the loneliness of one who knows both his own superior abilities and high courage, and his own isolation due to a Fate over which he had no control:

I have no brother, I am like no brother;
 And this word *love*, which greybeards call divine,
 Be resident in men like one another,
 And not in me: *I am myself alone—*

There are few more tragic cries in Shakespeare; its very exultance is the offspring of earlier despair. It is almost impossible to believe this Richard of Gloucester was not created by a maturer hand than Richard III; a hand which could give poetic stature to evil and was to move on to the pity, as well as the terror, of Macbeth.

But the supreme achievement of Shakespeare in these chronicle plays—as in the two parts of *Henry IV* which, also produced by a master like Seale, have been shown to be studies of kingship and its responsibilities—is to take the whole rambling panoply of the Wars of the Roses, with its periods of uneasy peace and spasmodic battles, its changing loyalties and its treacheries, and to keep its moral symbol clear and its participants living human beings. There is no dominating figure, although Henry and Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, nominally head the factions of Lancaster and York. And the concentration is so much on character and its responsibility for political disaster—the causes that provoke the effect, civil war—that it is not, in fact, until the very end of Part II that the war actually breaks out with the first Battle of St. Albans.

In Part I the wars are the wars in France, so calamitously mishandled by Henry's favourite Somerset that the efforts of York and the famous

fighter Talbot to preserve the French Empire are useless; while Suffolk's yielding of the Gallic provinces to bring about the fatal alliance of Henry with Margaret of Anjou equally undermines the policy of the Protector, Humphrey of Gloucester, at home. The play ends ominously on this theme, with Suffolk's:

Margaret shall now be queen and rule the king,
But I will rule both her, the King and realm.

In Part II the wrangling for power in the realm, with Suffolk and Margaret herself now added to the factious Duke Humphrey and Cardinal Beaufort, drives the country still further towards civil war. The downfall and murder of Humphrey now become the theme, most dramatically exploited and including the disgrace of his arrogant but beloved Duchess, Eleanor, and her penance after condemnation for witchcraft. There is passionate attachment between these two, and more than a hint of *Macbeth* in her attempts to fire Humphrey's ambition beyond the Protectorship to the crown—with Humphrey, no *Macbeth*, shocked and resistant but still feeling tenderly towards this woman in her suffering. Humphrey's murder (it was, historically, doubtful, and certainly Richard of York would have had no part in it) is superb material for the dramatist, and Shakespeare caps it with Beaufort's own violent death, raving in retribution (Scale produced this scene magnificently, with Alfred Burke, contorted of face and with talons clawing the air, dying horribly as the Cardinal among the lighted candles of his own altar). On Suffolk, too, retribution falls swiftly, to Margaret's bitter grief (the scene in which she embraces his severed head would defeat most young actresses, but not Rosalind Boxall, Birmingham's fine Margaret of Anjou, who, shirking nothing, deliberately brought the head right down to the footlights, without arousing laughter or diminishing the emotional impact of her mourning).

It is now that the field becomes clear for the family of York, supported by the Kingmaker Warwick, to be pitched against Margaret, the not very formidable Somerset and the King. There is no historic support for Shakespeare's view of Jack Cade as an illiterate boor set on by York to stir up trouble (though York's enemies manufactured a rumour that, although out of England at the time, he was behind the uprising), but Shakespeare makes of the rascal an amusing orange-



Henry VIII, Old Vic, 1953. Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Katharine of Aragon, John Warner as Cardinal Campeius and Alexander Knox as Wolsey.



Lisel Haas

Henry VI, Part I, Birmingham Repertory Company, Old Vic Theatre, 1953. (L. to R.) Edgar Wreford as Humphrey of Gloucester, Jack May as Henry VI, Alfred Burke as the Bishop of Winchester.



Lisel Haas

Henry VI, Part II. (L. to R.) Nancie Jackson (Duchess of Gloucester), Edgar Wreford (Duke Humphrey), Alfred Burke (Bishop of Winchester), Jack May (Henry VI), Rosalind Boxall (Margaret of Anjou).



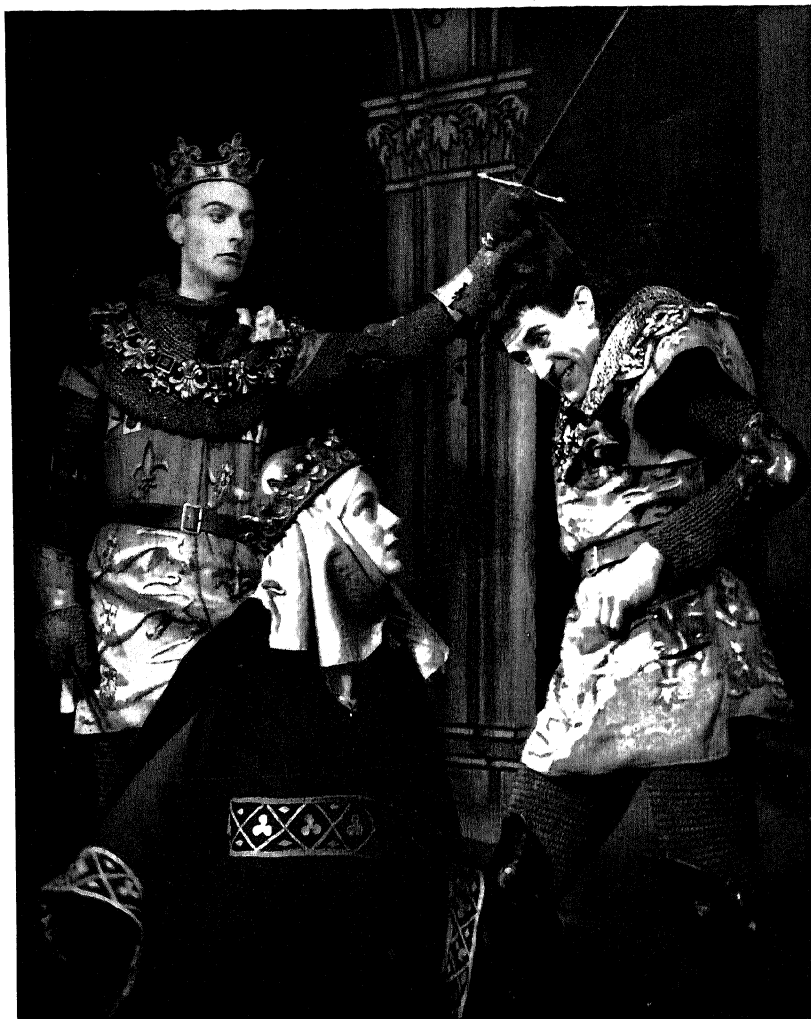
Lisel Haas

Henry VI, Part III, Birmingham Repertory Company, Old Vic Theatre, 1953. The death of York. Rosalind Boxall as Queen Margaret and John Arnatt (centre) as Richard, Duke of York.



Lisel Haas

Henry VI, Part III. Scene before Towton. Production by Douglas Seale. Setting by Finlay James.



Lisel Haus

Henry VI, Part III, Birmingham Repertory Company, Old Vic Theatre, 1953. (L. to R.) Alan Bridges as Edward IV, Rosalind Boxall as Queen Margaret, Edgar Wreford as Richard of Gloucester.

box rebel ("There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny"!), and the Kent rebellion provides some fiery alarms and excursions until Alexander Iden despatches Cade in his orchard, and the Lancastrian treachery at Blackheath drives York into open revolt and civil war.

The appearance of York's two sons, the martial Edward and Richard, turns the Yorkist cause into a more strongly family affair, with a sense of dynasty in the making, and here again Seale in his production deliberately emphasised this family unity, ending the scene and the play with the three in triumphant triangle, victorious swords aloft, beneath a Gothic arch as trumpets blared out the stirring fanfare which was a *motif* of these productions. If Shakespeare intended these three plays for "serial" performance on successive nights, as they were given at the Old Vic, he displayed a mastery of the form unsurpassed by the most successful script-writer of the silent film or television eras. The audiences, audibly seething with excitement, could hardly wait for the next instalment.

The last play, less dramatic than Part II, crystallises the theme. It was cut judiciously by Seale to compress the course of the war (it was, however, a pity to omit the youthful Henry of Richmond and King Henry's prophecy of his future), with York's and his son's deaths, the retributive murder of Prince Edward and the King, Warwick's defection and defeat and the flashing impact of the young Richard of Gloucester on our consciousness as keystones to the tragic arch. Henry in a crucified pose, against prison bars, at his death is a memorable picture; but Seale rightly made his centrepiece the King's soliloquy on the field of Towton, a moment of unearthly calm while the tempest of battle raged off-stage, and the opposite groups of the Son that has killed his father, and the Father that has killed his son, epitomised the domestic tragedy of civil war. The scene was stylised completely in lighting and performance, with Henry as a central Chorus commenting on the symbol and its poignant significance. Whether intended for production in this way or not, it is difficult to imagine Shakespeare felt of the scene as entirely realistic; poetic tragedy was already at work in him, and Henry's speech has a pathos, and a reflective significance, unsurpassed elsewhere in these plays and in the maturer Shakespearean tradition. Henry V's soliloquy before Agincourt is perhaps its nearest

dramatic equivalent; but his son's is the instinctive regret of the visionary, gentle and without casuistry:

Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich embroider'd canopy
To kings that fear their subjects' treachery.

(It was a favourite theme with Shakespeare, the countryman; echoed in Bolingbroke's "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown", the rueful fruit of usurpation, and contrasted ironically in these plays with the fated Richard of Gloucester's "And father, do but think, How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown".)

A great deal depends on the actor here, and Jack May's lyric mysticism in this great soliloquy, and whole scene, remains haunting and poignant in memory. But Henry, although a negative figure in the action and the pawn of stronger characters, is far from a negligible acting part and fully upholds his position as titular figure. May played him remarkably from callow youth to disillusioned and hunted age, achieving great emotional flexibility and saintliness without mawkishness (he even got away, by sheer guileless charm, with the boy-monarch's priggish rebuke about "wanton dalliance with a paramour" at the suggestion of his marriage—a moment also beautifully pointed by Edgar Wreford's Duke Humphrey with a momentary flicker of avuncular amusement in his eye). But it is Shakespeare's genius that Henry, though saintly, is no fool, and not entirely blind to the activities around him. Witness his shrewd and unexpected thrust as Margaret mourns over the body of her lover Suffolk: "I fear, my love, if that I had been dead, Thou would'st not have mourned so much for me."

It is perhaps because of this that Shakespeare deliberately omits reference to Henry's periods of madness. For he has created a progressive and tragic character, Christ-like in disillusion, and this disillusion becomes a theme of the play which links itself with that of the horrors of civil strife. The episode of the rogue Simcock, pretending the miracle of restored sight, seems introduced purely to emphasise it, and the actor exquisitely realised this, retaining his disillusion through the fight with the staves that followed; white-faced, unseeing, in sadness and pain remote from the lusty enjoyment around him. The three great speeches were superbly delivered, with growing power but racked with feeling; here was the anger of the saint, as well as his tenderness,

regality as well as political impotence, and May's eloquence achieved both fire and pathos, his musical voice and natural intelligence finding out the subtle rhythms of verse which are too often lost in modern classical acting (this sense of the verse and clarity of speech were, though, a feature of the company, praised everywhere for their audibility and fine voices). Lingered in the memory are May's slow exits, always the exits of a king even in despair, and his great luminous eyes, grief-filled and flinching, it would seem, at the world's torments. It was a part apparently so perfectly cast that it was difficult to judge if the actor, indeed, had any range outside it, but merely had the good fortune to be miraculously suited to the character. Agamemnon at Birmingham later conclusively dispelled this impression.

Pictorially, John Arnatt's Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, was a decorative adversary to this Henry and Rosalind Boxall's beautiful, regal and ferociously ageing Margaret. In gold tunic or silver armour, here was a figure of blond splendour, fit hero for his dark, deformed son Richard; but the attack was gentler than in the case of the other actors and his strong point was subtle intelligence: watchful, shaping events to his ends, indolently, and not without irony, stroking a golden beard, yet athletic in his response to action. His diction was less clear-cut than that of the rest of the company, of which he was not a regular member, but this superbly graced actor never lacked authority and in the death scene his moving qualities were profound, showing the imaginative sympathy that has distinguished him as an actor of Tchchov.

Edgar Wreford's noble Duke Humphrey, a very mature performance for a young actor, contrasted with his unrecognisable transformation to the mercurial Richard of Gloucester. Grave and dignified, he gave the Protector sympathy and distinction, being quietly moving in the scene of the Duchess' penance with little outward motion but a speaking grief in the eyes. His splendid speech of rebuke to his accusers won him an ovation at his exit. His only technical fault, a tendency to take too high and nervous a vocal pitch at the beginning of a speech or scene, was more apparent as Richard, although he cured it entirely soon after joining the Old Vic company. Otherwise he proved in both parts an exciting elocutionist and magnificent character actor, playing Richard young, without obvious make-up, and relying on his force and vitality as an actor helped by a remarkable facial resemblance

both to Henry Irving and the historical Richard III. The irony, and sheer joy in villainy, were particularly well conveyed; this Richard, lean and livid-faced, had the true "alacrity of spirit", with an eager ruthlessness that one felt must surely flash its way through to the throne.

The exhilarating nervous energy of this performance was in vivid contrast to the same actor's handsome, sombre Duke Humphrey, and his fine Warwick of the previous year's production, described by Ivor Brown, with a neat alliteration, as having "abundant guile and gumption". Bernard Hepton's Warwick lacked the Kingmaker's magnetic charm, but was impressively spoken, as were Alan Bridges' tall, fair young stripling Edward IV and organ-toned, rumbustious Talbot. Nancie Jackson, who had played Varya in the famous Liverpool Repertory Company production of *The Cherry Orchard* at the St. James's Theatre in 1948, proved herself once again an actress of fine range and emotional quality, doubling Joan of Arc with the proud and ill-starred Duchess of Gloucester.

Redmond Phillips' Louis XI, William Avenell's Jack Cade, Richard Pasco's Suffolk (though unavoidably young and lacking in full weight) and Alan Rowe's Somerset were all of good standard, and in the lightly witty little scene (very characteristic Shakespeare) between Edward and the Lady Grey, later his Queen, Eleanore Bryan showed the enormous eyes that were two years later to grace the popular Phoebe of an Old Vic *As You Like It*, and the fluffy-minded waitress of *Small Hotel* in the West End. Kenneth Williams, later Dauphin to Siobhan McKenna's Saint Joan and the priggish schoolboy of *The Buccaneer*, was the child Rutland, played the previous year (in a double with Lady Grey) by Christine Finn, the pretty society nitwit of the Bristol Old Vic *Salad Days*.

Sir Barry Jackson, the Birmingham director, had in fact gathered together an exceptional company of actors, virile, forceful and alive to the demands of both character and verse. In Douglas Seale, moreover, Birmingham had an outstanding producer. Like Guthrie in *Henry VIII*, he used a single permanent setting, allowing mobility and speed: against a triptych of Gothic arches, with beautiful effects of lighting and costume, his groupings formed and dissolved like stained-glass pictures, vivid in heraldry and sense of period. The imagination in dramatic action and character was equally intense, giving humanity to many scenes, such as York's playing affectionately on the floor with

his boy (so soon to die) at Sandal Castle, and (a subtle, humane touch) his throwing of a dagger to the condemned witch on a sudden impulse of mercy. York, too, was given a wounded arm in his death scene at Wakefield, which added moving realism to the scene and was made use of with sensitivity by the actor. Atmospheric effects were the blood on the wall behind the throne as the men crept into the Palace at the beginning of Part III, and the eerie lighting and choreographic grouping of the witchcraft scene with its weird background of a wind machine. Stylisation, as in the Towton scene, was finely used in Part I when Talbot and a group of wounded soldiers with banners remained immobilised in a background tableau, while on the forestage Sir William Lucy appealed in vain succession to York and Somerset for aid.

Finlay James designed the setting and the many fights were excitingly arranged by Bernard Hepton and John Greenwood (the young Prince Edward), who have since devised similar conflicts in many Shakespearcan productions and the film of *Richard III*.

English actors have, during the past few years, been much trounced for inaudibility; but this company from the provinces were a revelation in standards of verse-speaking, and the roaring ovation with which their performances were received was in a large part due to this. They proved that Sir Barry Jackson's *flair*, which has discovered for England some of our finest actors in the past, is still unequalled among our theatre directors, and his companies make Birmingham a vital centre of our theatre scene.

Venice Preserv'd

Good speaking, too, was an acknowledged aim of John Gielgud in his season for Tennent Productions at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. This had opened on 24th December, 1952, with his own production of *Richard II*, starring Paul Scofield as the King, and had been followed by Congreve's *The Way of the World* in which Gielgud and Scofield (in a brilliant and insouciant performance of Witwoud) both appeared, with Pamela Brown as Mrs. Millamant and Eileen Herlie as Mrs. Marwood. This triumphant quartet reappeared in the Coronation revival, on 15th May, 1953, of Otway's Restoration tragedy, *Venice Preserv'd*, once a magnet for the greatest English actors but during the past century fallen into neglect. This production by

Peter Brook, with impressive Canaletto-style settings by Leslie Hurry, showed the play could still hold the stage. The Lyric Theatre company feared laughter in the wrong places, but instead played to breathlessly attentive audiences and received fall-of-curtain cheers.

The principal reason for this was undoubtedly the superb playing of the four chief actors. Jaffeir, Pierre, Belvidera and Aquilina are famous parts, magnificently "placed" dramatically in conjunction, in a series of scenes which cover a wide range of emotions and strike sparks from the audience's suspense. Love, murder and revolution are the theatrically infallible themes, and the rather scurrilous Nicky-Nacky comedy scenes (played full out by Richard Wordsworth as the lecherous old Senator and Pamela Brown as the courtesan Aquilina), which have been omitted from almost all productions since the original in 1682, proved also to the taste of our contemporary audiences, closer in laxity of morals and innate ribaldry to the Restoration period than any, possibly, since that time (it is significant our stage has seen so many popular revivals of Restoration comedy, and not only due to the fact that this century has produced in Edith Evans the supremely witty Restoration player).

The play is in theme a Venetian *Julius Caesar* and in its two principal male characters, Jaffeir and Pierre, we see, as in Brutus and Cassius, a study in political conspiracy as it affects a friendship between two highly contrasted characters. All this side of the play is expertly handled and the language itself, in the scenes between the two friends, does not present any real problems of sincerity or dramatic effect to the actors. Pierre in particular, on the subject of revolt, has simplicity and force of dialogue, the verse rhythms unstrained and the vocabulary singularly free from the ornate and high-flown rhetoric of the worst type of blank-verse tragedy that succeeded Shakespeare.

Justice is lame as well as blind amongst us;
The Laws (corrupted to their ends that make 'em)
Serve but for Instruments of some new Tyranny
That every day starts up to enslave us deeper.

It is admirably direct; and he can even flash a line of authentic dramatic poetry:

Drive us like Wracks down the rough Tide of Power . . .
What starve like Beggars Brats in frosty weather,
Under a Hedge, and whine ourselves to death.

The allegory is strong and clear, supple to the tongue and full of spirit. It is in the love scenes of the far more sentimental, romantic Jaffair that the danger lies, and Belvidera's mad scene has come up in our theatre more than once for parody. Judicious cutting did something, but not all; only the passionate conviction and sincerity of the playing really held off ridicule at difficult moments, but Gielgud and Eileen Herlie did achieve this, helped by the fact that the emotional problems of the characters, in the dilemmas in which they find themselves, are natural enough and close enough to the general human reaction in distress to enable the actors to feel for the characters as individuals, and infuse that feeling into the language even at its most profuse in metaphor.

Otway's near-downfall, here, was doubtless his own romantic and unrequited passion for the actress Mrs. Barry, the original Belvidera; it betrayed him into high-flown sentiment even in his letters, and the theatrical taste of the time presumably did the rest. But it has made Jaffair the more difficult of the two principal male parts to play in modern times, although they are approximately co-equal in stature, and indeed throughout theatrical history there have been revulsions against Jaffair as something of a whining weakling—alternating with revulsions against Pierre, the champion of liberty or rebel against the State, according to the political atmosphere of the times. On the whole, our leading actors have generally settled on Jaffair as the star rôle: Betterton (the original), Garrick, John Kemble (with his famous sister Mrs. Siddons as Belvidera) and Edmund Kean all played it, although Garrick began by portraying Pierre and was fully aware of the problems on tackling the other character: "the Part of Jaffair is a most difficult and laborious character, and will take me up much time, before I have attained what I imagine may be done with it".

It is almost certain that Kean, the firebrand, would have been better advised to play Pierre; but Garrick's Jaffair, like Gielgud's, re-established the character as one of some nobility in spite of the lack, obvious in the text, of heroic fibre. Its appeal to the actor is its more fluid emotions and romantic tenderness of character, attributes more likely to appeal to audiences (at least feminine audiences) at large than the more bitter, loose-living, masculinely rebellious Pierre, a stronger but on the whole less flexible character to play.

Gielgud's grief, tenderness and passionate self-laceration were

exactly what the part required, together with loftiness of visage to create the illusion of nobility and a voice of such music and range that the verse became an orchestration of sound, pliant with feeling and too genuine in distress to fail to pull at the heart. Dramatically, he could still rise to the level of Pierre and, after the cold douche of his friend's virulent scorn, thrust into the great scene of threatening Belvidera with the dagger without an effect of anti-climax or relaxation of tension.

With Scofield's flashing young Pierre this was no easy task, and even so this actor came close, at times, to stealing the play's dramatic honours. His Richard II had been a deeply intelligent study, poignant and compelling, though perhaps a little too overlaid by Gielgud's own conception, as former actor and present producer, to mark itself supremely as a great creative interpretation. In Pierre he found a new strength, a superb bitterness of tongue, and a virility and fire not surpassed on our stage for some years. This young actor of height and grace not only fitted the part in looks, he sculptured the character to three-dimensional dramatic contours and delved into the sources of spiritual revolt and sense of betrayal. His "Curst be your Senate: Curst your Constitution" sparked lightning; his cannon-shot retort, "Death, honourable death!" at the Duke's "Pardon or death?" had splendid pride of spirit; and the bitterness of his:

It will not be the first time I've lodg'd hard
To doe your Senate service—

remains in memory with his gesture of flinging the dagger at Jaffier. At the end, there was tragic heroism too, and a moving nobility in defeat.

Eileen Herlie, more palely luminous and tender than heretofore in a fair wig, naturalised Belvidera's transports, in which Mrs. Siddons was compared to a "resistless torrent" bearing all down before her; the result was more affecting than anything this young actress had yet given us, and nicely contrasted with Pamela Brown's wide-eyed, witty "daughter of the game" Aquilina, with her cascade of hair like orange flame, and a subtle way with a line such as—

But the Beast has Gold
That makes him necessary. . . .

The tragedy rests on this quartet; but Eric Porter made an effective cringing villain of the conspirator Renault, and Brewster Mason, who had been an outstanding Northumberland in *Richard II* and ebullient Sir Wilfull Witwoud in *The Way of the World*, gave dignity to the Spanish Ambassador. The motiveless "heavy father", Priuli, however, nearly defeated even as good an actor as Herbert Lomas.

Paul Scofield this season crowned a career of growing distinction, and shared with his Old Vic namesake, Paul Rogers, a striking versatility. In the absence of creative dramatists, these two were the bright rising planets of our new Elizabethan stage.

II

ELIOT, WHITING AND FRY

The Confidential Clerk

ALTHOUGH no new plays of distinction appeared during the Coronation period, Graham Greene's first play, *The Living Room*, a Catholic "morality", continued to pack Wyndham's Theatre with a magnificent cast headed by Eric Portman and Dorothy Tutin, who took London by storm as a girl torn tragically between her religion and her first passionate love affair with a married man. The girl's final suicide is not wholly convincing when read, but in the theatre the actress made it utterly and poignantly so.

The success of this play showed that English audiences continue to be attracted by plays with some moral problem or background, symbolically pointed. T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* had a similar core, and his new verse play, *The Confidential Clerk*, was awaited with special interest. After setting off some preliminary fireworks, and much brain-racking among the critics, at the Edinburgh Festival, where it was first performed on 25th August, 1953, it had a fashionable first night three weeks later at the Lyric Theatre in London, and ended the creative stagnation of the Summer theatre. Its success was enormous, if provocative, and Henry Sherek, its presenter, made a record-breaking deal with the theatre ticket libraries.

Eliot, in fact, had once again brought off the difficult feat of making verse pay dividends in the theatre; although his means of doing so was, as in *The Cocktail Party*, to disguise verse as far as possible and to wrap his philosophy and observation of life (and the new play, like the earlier one, contained both) in a sugar-coating of sophisticated comedy.

The plot of *The Confidential Clerk* borders on Wildean farce of *The Importance of Being Earnest* type. A successful financier, Sir Claude Mulhammer, has engaged a new confidential clerk, Colby Simpkins, who is, he believes, his own illegitimate son. The boy would prefer to be a professional organist, but, suspecting his lack of first-rate talent, is trying to come to terms with life like his father before him. For

Sir Claude, it transpires, had himself wanted to be a potter, and only gradually had found himself fitting into the pattern his own father had mapped out for him.

Also of the household is another illegitimate child, a daughter, Lucasta, who underneath a brittle flighty manner hides a bitter resentment of her bastardy and sense of isolation. And before the evening is out another foundling adds to the genealogical chaos and the play becomes a riotous guessing game as to which foundling belongs to whom. For Sir Claude's wife, the apparently feather-brained but not unshrewd Lady Elizabeth, has herself what is euphemistically termed "mis-laid" a son, and comes to believe that the attractive Colby is *her* son, not Sir Claude's.

The imbroglia is finally resolved by a matron startlingly reminiscent of the Gilbertian Inez in *The Gondoliers*, who claims Colby as her own and leaves Sir Claude a suddenly lonely and tragic figure, a man bereft of a longed-for son and yet still ending the play on a query, unconvinced.

But this is a play in which the farcical details are really irrelevant. Doubtless a great deal can be read into Eliot's plays that he never intentionally put there, and it is wrong, I think, to look for some deep moral purpose. What the comedy certainly has is an inner core of wisdom. It is a discussion of life and the intense, and often frustrated, human need for satisfying relationships, of the influence or non-influence of heredity on vocation, of wish-fulfilment as a source of happiness, of the father-son bond which may be read at will (and it is necessary to remember that Eliot is in essence a religious writer) to contain overtones of the spiritual bond of God the Father and His children.

This last is perhaps most definitely suggested in Sir Claude's final belief that the destiny his father mapped out for him was the right one, and in a most moving scene between him and Colby in Act I, when the two find their common bond as frustrated artists and the financier's vision for a moment, perhaps, touches the mystic sources of God's creation as well as man's:

Could a man be said to have a vocation
To be a second-rate potter? To be, at best,
A competent copier, possessed by the craving
To create, when one is wholly uncreative?

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I don't think so. There are occasions
When I am transported, a different person
Transfigured in the vision of some marvellous creation,
And I feel what the man must have felt when he made it.
But nothing *I* made ever gave me that contentment—
That state of utter exhaustion and peace
Which comes in dying to give something life.

A revealing poignancy comes again in a later scene between Colby and Lucasta, tenderly and happily bridging their loneliness in a growing understanding of each other, until the revelation that they are half-brother and sister shatters the delusion of romance. Even the engagingly muddle-minded Lady Elizabeth has her moment of understanding with Sir Claude; and the apparently ill-assorted couple turn out to have more mutual interest than they themselves had realised. For at the back of this play, too, is the old sense of the enigma of one person to another; of the mask which cannot be fully pierced even in the closest of relationships:

Just when you think you're on the point of release
From loneliness, then loneliness swoops down upon you.

The play, too, has a mask: the mask of comedy which only partially conceals the intellect and sensibility of the theologian and poet. Its wit lies mainly in Lady Elizabeth, with her special brand of reasoning in which illogicality and the logical become, at times, riotously confused. Isabel Jeans pointed her absurdity with immense wit; but the serious overtones were lost in this exercise in high comedy. The actress was unmoved and therefore unmovable, and just could not say:

Of course there's something in us,
In all of us, which isn't just heredity,
But something unique. Something we have been
From eternity. Something . . . straight from God.

Margaret Leighton, equally flighty on the surface, drove through to Lucasta's inward pain with genuine passion, and Paul Rogers as Sir Claude made the financier, rightly, an immobile but dominating figure of pathos in the final scene. The man was kind, real, touched with the daze of loneliness and loss. A brilliant sketch of the elderly retiring clerk by Alan Webb was the best of the other performances. Denholm Elliott as Colby was sensitive and attractive, but without the rebellion and mystic detachment which emerge from the play when read.

E. Martin Browne produced this, as all previous plays by Eliot. But in spite of lesser names in the cast it is nevertheless true that at the Bristol Old Vic, in May 1955, the production of André Van Gyseghem gained in team-balance, which was slightly lacking in town owing to the predominance of Isabel Jeans' star comedy performance as Lady Elizabeth. Mary Savidge's natural sincerity and warmth in this part, plus a gift for high comedy in the Edith Evans tradition, illuminated the later scenes with Sir Claude and gave a note needed in their relationship: tolerance and kindness. Her playing, and that of Edgar Wreford, of the scene in which the two grasp at an unexpected mutual understanding was, as a result, closer knit and more responsive, and moving in its implications.

Faced with a son played by an actor, Michael Allinson, several years older than himself, Wreford's Mulhammer was forced by circumstance as well as natural personality to be more advanced in years and restrained than Rogers' warm, robust London performance. Not yet thirty-two, he achieved an arresting make-up perhaps a little more suggestive of Cheltenham than the City, but the portrait was gravely stylish and compelling and not without its dry and less hearty sense of humour. Allinson, a Bach piano player, which suited the play better, at the opening of the second Act, than Elliott's Debussy, had a certain distinction and gained on Elliott, I thought, at the moment of Lucasta's revelation of their relationship, where the West End actor's turn of the head had been just quick enough to destroy the sense of its coming as a surprise. Allinson's slow timing of the realisation was both more moving and more natural. Neither actor had quite the right personality to convince one of the ascetic and religious dedication implied, perhaps too suddenly and without dramatic preparation, in the last scene. Wreford, curiously enough, with his gift for reticence and spiritual detachment, might have been better cast here.

Rosemary Harris, though she did not carry Margaret Leighton's blazing guns for Lucasta's big emotional scene, or equal her superb suggestion of the inborn coarseness of the mother which, in the moment of agony, flared out, brought enormous beauty, mischief and tenderness to the part, while the Mrs. Guzzard of a twenty-two-year-old actress, Phyllida Law, was a remarkably realistic, detailed and deeply felt characterisation, right outside the West End façade and entirely in "place" (respectable suburban middle age) and character. Bristol's

inventive resident designer, Patrick Robertson, produced a most delectable pent-house and a witty note, not too stylised to destroy the illusion, of Wedgwood design into the Mulhammer library.

Marching Song

Periodically the English theatre is shaken by a talent so controversial that in the rising dust of the earthquake tremors critic may be seen battling with actor, dramatist with audience, and a divided audience with audience.

Such an upheaval occurred in 1950, when *Saint's Day*, a play by a young actor, John Whiting, received the Arts Theatre first prize of £700 as best entry in a competition which drew nearly one thousand plays. It had already been performed at the theatre and damned as incomprehensible by the critics. The judges, Alec Clunes, Christopher Fry and Peter Ustinov, made their award nevertheless, and equally prominent and serious-minded theatre personalities rushed to their defence. Controversy raged, smouldered and died.

On 8th April, 1954, Whiting produced his third play (his first, *A Penny for a Song*, was a crazy fantasy of the Napoleonic Wars which preceded the more tragic and combustible *Saint's Day*). It was called *Marching Song*, was presented at the St. Martin's Theatre by the important firm of Tennent's, and although a few faint cries of bafflement were heard in the background, it was treated with a sobriety that suggested the dramatist had at least won his battle for serious consideration.

That he should ever have been denied it is a question which must depress any intelligent person who sees this play. For although it is true Whiting is still feeling his way along the dangerous borderline of narrative and symbolism, and his dramatic structure lacks full mastery, the quality of his mind and the powerful contemporary impact of his ideas ignite a spark in our theatre which died out with Bernard Shaw. Whiting has Shaw's gift to send not one but half a dozen intellectual hares chasing about the stage. He has the advantage in imagination (if one excepts the greatest of Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, *Heartbreak House* and *Saint Joan*), a disadvantage in lack of wit. This means he cannot, like Gilbert's Jack Point, "gild the philosophic pill"; at least

in this play. Those who come to it must be prepared to use their brains, and if possible come again.

Whiting's story is simple. A General of a defeated country is released after seven years' imprisonment and the departure of the occupying forces. The Government and people want a scapegoat for defeat, and he is to be put on trial. But the Prime Minister, a wily and worldly old bird acted by Ernest Thesiger in his best Shavian manner, sees that the mud thrown will be destructive to the country's reputation, and he gives the General thirty-six hours in which to take the alternative of suicide.

The General, who has ceased to love his rich and devoted mistress, and bluntly told her so, has no further use for the world, yet is drawn back to it temporarily by a young urchin pick-up whose honesty, hardness and egoistic desire to keep free of emotional chains match his own contemporary bitterness and self-segregation. But in the end he takes the inevitable decision; while the girl herself, suddenly conscious of the call of human responsibility, loses her prized freedom in an attempt to comfort and strengthen the now lost and dependent mistress.

What are the intellectual hares started by this bald narrative? The General and the girl live, defiantly, in the present; the mistress and a once-famous film director in the past. What is past cannot be revived. Yet a helmet found by the General on the field of battle suggests the eternal recurrence of human civilisation and destruction:

I found this helmet beneath the tracks of my carrier in battle. I picked it up and a skull rattled inside. After hundreds of years he'd come to the surface and we were still fighting over the same ground. Nothing had been gained since the day he'd fallen. I was attempting with my armoured vehicle only to do what he'd tried to do with his armoured head and his antique sword. His end on that field was death, mine was disgrace. But I was left as surely and eternally in that clay cold earth as was this comrade-in-arms of mine.

The challenge to man's decision is the same; but the *personal* response will always be unpredictable.

The great test of the General's character was at a terrible moment in the war—a recurring Massacre of the Innocents, perhaps the

dramatist would say—when he was faced with the alternative of halting his advance or massacring a gang of children possibly set on by the enemy to immobilise his tanks. A man with a passion for military science, who had worked only for Napoleonic eminence in his career, he recognised the challenge, and accepted it. He shot the child leader through the mouth. But then for the first time he knew, the dead child in his arms, what humanity was. He could not carry on with the advance; this, the supreme irony, was his “treachery” to his country. He will never fight again. But a younger soldier, as the dramatist hints ominously at the end of the play, may meet the same challenge, and advance.

This superb, Ibsen-like revelation of the General's character, and the cause of his disgrace, comes in two parts: the first a statement, the second an unconscious self-justification. Nothing could have been finer than Robert Flemyng's controlled delivery of the two long speeches: unemotional, almost detached, yet with a suggestion of inward horror, lacerated feeling, deliberately suppressed by bitterness. This cold yet haunting performance by an underrated serious actor made Rupert Forster the dynamic character of the play: a psychological mixture of T. E. Lawrence, Napoleon and the flaying human conscience of our time.

Diana Wynyard brought compassion and classical beauty to the mistress, Catherine, with a not unclever suggestion of the woman's indolent and purposeless society background. A young actress, Penelope Munday, though interesting and beautifully reposed, gave perhaps too hard and level an edge to the European urchin. The setting was symbolic, an abstraction of modernistic architecture, and a suitable frame in which the play's thought could range free, although the Bristol Old Vic production later in the year surpassed the London one, as in the case of *The Confidential Clerk*, in creativeness of design; Patrick Robertson's set adding a vista of distant mountains and a touch of humanity lacking in the uncompromising modernity and chilly colours of the London *décor*.

Bristol altogether, under John Moody, gave the play an unexpectedly taut production, with at least two performances that seemed to me finer than the London ones—Paul Lee's self-destroying American and Perlita Neilson's young contemporary girl, Dido Morgan, whose callous husk here cracked, in the scenes with the General, to reveal a

(Right) *The Confidential Clerk* (T. S. Eliot).
Bristol Old Vic, 1955. Edgar Wreford (left) as
Sir Claude Mulhammer and Michael Allinson
as Colby.

(Below) Lyric Theatre, 1953. Paul Rogers (right)
as Sir Claude Mulhammer and Denholm Elliott as
Colby.



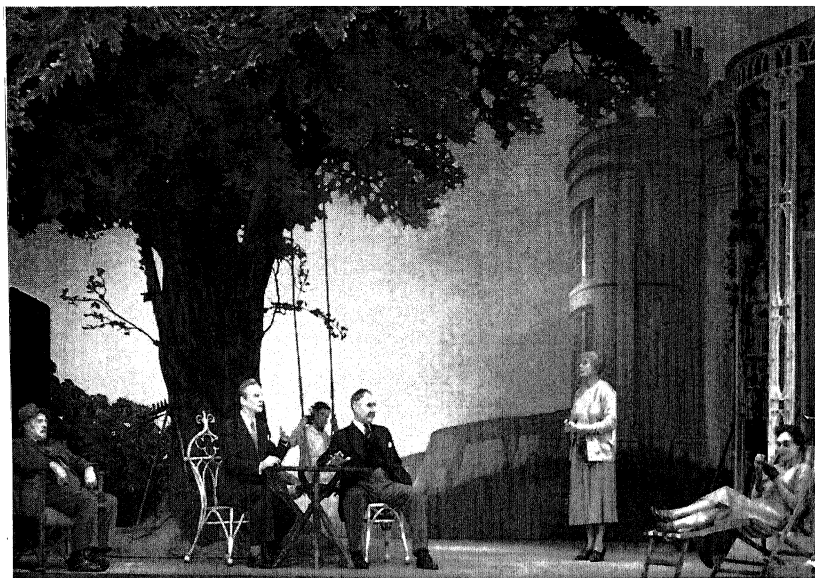
Desmond Tripp



Houston Rogers

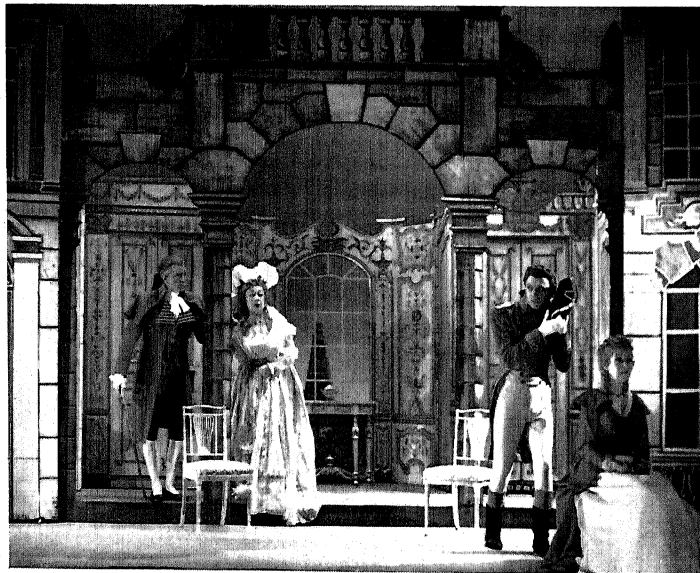


Separate Tables (Rattigan), St. James's, 1954. *Table by the Window*. Margaret Leighton as Mrs. Shankland and Eric Portman as Mr. Martin. Armstrong



Angus McBean

A Day by the Sea (N. C. Hunter), Haymarket, 1953. Scene with (L. to R.) Lewis Casson, John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, Sybil Thorndike and Irene Worth. Setting by Felix Kelly.



Houston Rogers

The Rivals (Sheridan), Saville, 1956. Scene with (L. to R.) John Clements (Sir Anthony), Athene Seyler (Mrs. Malaprop), Laurence Harvey (Captain Absolute), Kay Hammond (Lydia). Setting by Peter Rice.

brief flowering of heart-wringing pathos. The girl's final gesture of sacrifice, never entirely convincing, became as a result more credible, a development of character for which we had been subtly prepared.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this play is its pliability to personal interpretation; no "reading" is likely to be definitive, and the character of Rupert Forster, with its tragic "overtones", is in this sense something of a Hamlet of our time. Edgar Wreford, preserving the necessary restraint and lack of self-pity, played the man less as the frustrated general, more as one who, having passed through a profound and shattering spiritual experience, has come to a calm acceptance of life and death which implies both sainthood and martyrdom. A quietly impressive and moving performance from an actor, then thirty and young for the part, who nevertheless possessed, and could project, the mature intellect of a much older man. Mary Savidge's sympathetic Catherine, less edged and *demi-mondaine* and thus perhaps a little less in character than Diana Wynyard's, seemed as it were, like Perlita Neilson's Dido, to warm the ashes of the contemporary world's defeat; and Michael Allinson's Cadmus, though lacking Thesiger's full ironic senility, spoke the fine prose with a delicate Shavian distinction.

London during the Winter of 1953 and Spring of 1954 saw several plays of strong contemporary dramatic content, but the closing of *Marching Song* after five weeks showed how dependent such plays are on an understanding Press or some "fashionable" author's name for West End success. Nevertheless, in spite of the rival claims of Charles Morgan's *The Burning Glass* and Christopher Fry's *The Dark Is Light Enough*, Whiting's imaginative tragedy remains the most memorable of these plays. Few went to see it; but many of the few, fascinated, went again and again, and included the leaders of the theatrical profession. Robert Flenyng's study of the General in disgrace—a performance of integrity and imagination, deep inside the character and subtly consistent in expression and gesture (the eyes narrowed to see beyond "the other side of the hill", the hands sensitive yet capable)—will surely long be remembered, and the Tennent management honoured, in time to come, for giving a West End production and cast to a play which really needed a trained serious audience such as that at the Old Vic, and which the early Shaw plays had under the Granville-Barker régime. No one in the serious theatre doubts Whiting's ultimate importance.

The Dark Is Light Enough

It has become customary for major productions intended for the West End to have a "try-out" in the form of a provincial tour; and occasionally London playgoers are tempted to snatch a "preview" (and a breath of sea air) when the tour includes the historic and charming Regency theatre, the Brighton Theatre Royal. Here, where the foyers are plastered with old playbills, covering many delights in the nineteenth-century Theatre Royal from "the last appearance of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean" to a sequin-spangled Edmund Kean as Richard III, Christopher Fry, early in 1954, heralded the Spring with his new play about Winter.

We had waited a long time for *The Dark Is Light Enough*, for it was known that Fry, in spite of the rich and apparently spontaneous combustion of his word imagery, is a slow writer for whom genius is truly a matter, not just of inspiration, but of taking pains. If his typewriter sings, it does so only after long and bitter schooling.

It was known his new verse play, following the Spring of *The Lady's Not For Burning* and the Autumn of *Venus Observed*, was to be "a Winter story", and was being written with Dame Edith Evans in mind for the leading part. Later we gathered that its scene was to be a country house during the Hungarian revolution of 1848-49.

That it is a play with some inner allegory is apparent from its strange preface, a quotation from J. H. Fabre:

The weather was stormy; the sky heavily clouded; the darkness . . . profound. . . . It was across this maze of leafage, and in absolute darkness, that the butterflies had to find their way in order to attain the end of their pilgrimage.

Under such conditions the screech-owl would not dare to forsake its hollow in the olive tree. The butterfly . . . goes forward without hesitation. . . . So well it directs its tortuous flight that, in spite of all the obstacles to be evaded, it arrives in a state of perfect freshness, its great wings intact. . . . The dark is light enough. . . .

The image haunts the mind, yet its application at first is elusive. Is this unshattered butterfly the Countess Rosmarin of this story, winging through dark events, on an undeflected course, to a tranquil death?

Certainly, in the person of the exquisite and incomparable Edith Evans, she had a butterfly's caprice and power to bewitch.

The Countess, a woman of wit, courage and distinction, is no longer young. She feels, as she puts it, a "disenchantment of the body", and we sense a summer radiance on which winter has set its feathered touch, light and cold as the snowflakes descending from the iron sky outside the window. Yet her spirit bounds on unconquered in upheaval. When the play opens she has deserted her Thursday salon and, with characteristic recklessness, driven through the snow to rescue an irresponsible author now involved in the revolution, and once the husband of her daughter.

He is a man of bad reputation, who after one book lost touch with words ("I wrote frustration syllable by syllable"), a drifter through life who feels, not bodily, but spiritual disenchantment, and having deserted the revolutionaries is now hunted and chilled by the fear of death.

Yet to the Countess he is still someone with some quality she values, someone to be sheltered at eminent risk to herself and contrary to all advice. She will not give him up, even when his pursuers occupy her house, and in the flux and flow of victory and defeat the revolution hammers at her own family.

She is a woman of principle who loves life; he a man without principles who dislikes it yet fears to lose it. For a moment, he finds new attraction in her daughter, now happily married, and his magnetism brings near-disaster. A shot in the snow shatters the dancing and song which the Countess, irrepressible, has stirred from adversity. For a moment, later, he believes the Countess herself loves him. But, serenely enigmatic to the end, she dies quietly in the now stripped and ravaged house; and, beaten by her will in death, he finds the courage to stay and this time face his pursuers.

It is always hard to assess Fry on one hearing. There are wisdom and beauty of language in this play, but less of his usual wit and joking play with words; and it has a verbal austerity, at times, closer than one had expected to T. S. Eliot. Undoubtedly it shows an increase in Fry's command of dramatic tension, and at Brighton one hoped some weaknesses in casting would be revised before the play reached London. Gettner, the rootless intellectual, seemed in particular a character not fully resolved. But the things of which one could write with certainty

were the Countess and Edith Evans' playing of her; these had a style, authority and unquenchable charm that lifted the play to magic.

The play moved to the Aldwych Theatre on 30th April, 1954, and outlasted the short-lived *Marching Song* by several months; though one suspected it was Fry's now fashionable name, and the radiant dancing star that is Edith Evans, that maintained it in the vanishing Milky Way of London's "serious" theatre.

Certainly it took the West End stage bravely; with less qualities of mind than *Marching Song*, but not totally dissimilar in theme. Its military outlook is not that, however, of the professional but of the humane outsider, the shining Countess whose fascinated interest in life is to preserve all things living, however apparently worthless, and of whatever political or military attachments. She is the radiant centre-piece of this poetic and humanistic commentary on life in wartime upheaval, as General Forster is the colder, intellectual centrepiece of *Marching Song*; she gives to life, and takes from it, with serene and glowing generosity, while he withdraws into his bruised, monastic and incommunicative soul.

Both plays are about life; but Fry, except in this one character made memorable by his own wisdom and the acting of Edith Evans, does not reflect it in any breadth. Margaret Johnston, fair, elegant and poised, tried hard with the Countess' wraith-like daughter, and succeeded in part; but James Donald, harsh of voice for the poetry, strong in attack, could not breathe full life into the cowardly, ultimately enigmatic Richard Gettner, and was, perhaps, spiritually out of key with so complex a character. Some of the minor parts are little more than butts of humour, and they were not, moreover, particularly well played. Peter Brook's production otherwise had imagination, Oliver Messel finely evoking the atmosphere of the period salon and its dissolution, with the winter snows outside, in his beautiful sets.

It is because each character in *Marching Song* reflects a facet, and an important facet, of human nature and contemporary conscience and morality, that I place the play above *The Dark Is Light Enough*; and in its way its finely structured prose can match Fry's iridescent verse. But Fry progresses dramatically, and his poetic vision puts him in a place apart in our theatre. He is conscious of the mystery and enchantment of living, and his words sing as they have not sung since Shakespeare and the Elizabethans.

III

DRAMATISTS OF SUBSTANCE

The Burning Glass

IT has been bitterly complained that the English theatre lacks new plays of distinction. And it has been pointed out by Michael Redgrave, in his vivid analysis of his art, *The Actor's Ways and Means*, that whereas in France all the great national novelists write for the stage, in England there is an almost complete cleavage between the literary world and the dramatic.

One of the few exceptions to this rule is Charles Morgan, whose *The Burning Glass*, produced at the Apollo Theatre on 18th February, 1954, was his third play to be produced in London. It may be purely coincidental that Morgan's work has received high honours in France, and that before the war he did long and distinguished service as dramatic critic of *The Times*. Nevertheless, certain qualities that might be anticipated from such a record emerge from his third play, as they emerged from his fine previous one, *The River Line*: qualities of intellect and literary precision, and a grasp of dramatic tension in the theatre. For once we have a play which, in its superb second Act in particular, harnesses the power to excite with the power to exercise the mind.

And indeed Morgan needed this power, for his theme has cosmic implications. It is no less than the threatened "subversion of the relationship between man and Nature", the discussion of the scientist's right, when his discovery puts into his hands a complete and destructive power over the world's natural order, to withhold that dangerous power even for deceptively "beneficent" uses.

Our genius is great, only in the proportion of our littleness. If we aspire to omnipotence, or even to such a degree of power as destroys that proportion, we forfeit the compassion and call down upon ourselves the anger and the ridicule of the gods. This is the accumulated wisdom of mankind, embodied in our legends—in

the tale of Adam, of Icarus, of Faust, of Satan himself. And in the legend of Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven.

It was sometimes said of Shaw that his Prefaces were even finer than his plays; and the Preface to *The Burning Glass* from which the above quotations are taken may well win for Morgan a similar back-handed compliment. But let there be no mistake about this: the play can stand on its own feet in the theatre, as Shaw's did. For in spite of his suggestion that we may apprehend between the lines some cosmic truth and dread, "a touch in the dark", Morgan deals with the dilemma of human beings, faced with a decision of conscience, and he is not above melodrama to hold our attention.

The "burning glass" of his title is the discovery—in one of those intuitive "jumps" by which mathematicians sometimes leap to a result without intermediate steps—of a young scientist, Christopher Terriford, who is suddenly aware of the enormous power it places in his hands: the power to destroy by fire any selected portion of the earth. The power is so complete and revolutionary that the Prime Minister must be told; but Christopher is deeply aware of his own responsibility, and though he will impart the knowledge of his discovery, and even direct its use in event of supreme emergency in war, he will not divulge the actual "setting" of his machine, which he carries in his head, in case of its eventual misuse.

The plot thereafter involves the "enemy agent" of tradition, a kidnapping, and a battle of will and conscience, as gripping as any scene of action, between the Prime Minister and the scientist. Its skeleton is melodramatic—too conventionally melodramatic in its "Iron Curtain" villain, black opposed to the troubled hero's morally unshaded white; but it is a tribute to the dramatist that in the Prime Minister—a man of wisdom and moral courage, played with burly authority by Laurence Naismith—he has created a character we can accept, without effort, as a great man, even though (and herein lies the humanity of the writing) we may sometimes dispute his judgment and decision.

With the scientist and his wife he is less successful, partly because the scientist's assistant, Tony Lack, splits our interest with a more powerful and moving, though less integrated, personality. As this man, still young—a sensualist with imagination, tortured by the hell of the

loving but unloved, without spiritual roots—Michael Gough gave a performance that all but dominated the play. Yet he is not the protagonist, and he should not so dominate.

That is the play's weakness, not the actor's. But it is a weakness—like the perhaps inevitable decrease in momentum after the second Act—that we can afford to overlook. For this is not only a penetrating illumination of a terrible problem of our time—a modern echo of the passion for natural order that the earlier Elizabethans found expressed for them by Shakespeare in Ulysses' great speech in *Troilus and Cressida*. It is a play, with good acting, to fire the stage. And this, at the Apollo Theatre, it did.

A Day By The Sea

A well-known London literary agent announced during 1953 that he would cease, in future, to handle plays owing to the difficulties of getting them staged. It was, in fact, something of an event when the major firm of H. M. Tennent produced a new play, *Waters of the Moon*, by an entirely unknown dramatist, N. C. Hunter. With a cast-list normally lavished by this management on "dressy" Oscar Wilde revivals, and including two actress Dames, *Waters of the Moon* achieved a run of eighteen months.

The waters of the moon, though reflecting a pure and blameless Tchekovian silver, would appear not to have been entirely mineral in nature. For they went sufficiently to the management's head to induce them to stage Hunter's next play, *A Day By The Sea*, with a cast which made the previous one seem plebeian. *Three Knights By The Sea* might be a better title for this play, produced at the Haymarket Theatre on 26th November, 1953, in which Sir John Gielgud, Sir Ralph Richardson and Sir Lewis Casson appeared with Sir Lewis' wife, Dame Sybil Thorndike, and one of the finest of our younger actresses, Irene Worth.

The author, too, had apparently decided to repeat the successful formula. *A Day By The Sea* proved even more Tchekovian than his previous play, but not, perhaps, so moving in its characterisation. *Waters of the Moon* had at least the shadow of a plot, a tracery of humanity which not only fell across but pierced below the surface of what the Irish dramatists (who are often so oddly like the Russian) would call the Shadowy Waters.

The sea of the later play is serene in comparison. The mansion house and its inhabitants have so Tchegovian an air that one is surprised to find that the English oak in the garden is not covered in a white spray of cherry blossom. But nothing as important as the sale of a cherry orchard (not to count the host of suicides, would-be suicides and near-murders in Tchegov's so-called "actionless" dramas) takes place at Hunter's house in Dorset. A deaf and gentle he-ancient sleeps in the sun; a fussy hostess wistfully dreams of marrying off a middle-aged son; the son, a visionary and unsuccessful diplomat, misses one more step to promotion and, realising (a little too quickly for dramatic psychology) that life is slipping past him, proposes as unsuccessfully to a marriage-worn divorcée; a gin-soaked doctor, straight out of *Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters*, holds forth on a Nature red in tooth and claw, and with a sudden tenderness comforts the spinster who has desperately proposed to him.

You know, there's a certain sort of tree that only flowers every twelve years—or ten perhaps—I forget which. And so it is with certain lives . . .

In moments such as this the dramatist coins his own poetry, and always beneath the surface of this play there lurks a symbol of Nature and of life. Elsewhere his tragi-comedy, like Tchegov's, is full of echoes. But whereas in Tchegov the echoes are from the pasts of his living characters, in Hunter the echoes seem too often to belong, not to his own characters, but to Tchegov's. Vershinin, Tusenbach, Astrov, Trofimov . . . their shadows crossed the Dorset sun as Gielgud's windbag idealist of a diplomat mused on the miraged splendours of man's future. We were touched, rarely deeply moved. But in comedy the characters ring true; the observation of human foibles is delicate and funny, and laughter nearly always breaks into a threatened patch of boredom.

Perhaps realising this, Gielgud delivered the diplomat's long speeches with a subtle wit that was both dry and affectionate. This was not a performance likely to haunt the mind like his racked and magnificent Cassius in the film of *Julius Caesar* which appeared at the same time as this play. But it reminded us that our greatest classical actor is also our most stylish comedian and, when the bitter, disap-

pointed line of the lip vanished in the last Act, that there is a side to his temperament that can only be described as "sunny".

Lewis Casson, himself an apple-cheeked seventy-eight, firmly put the author's "octogenarian" in the nonagenarian class with an overlay of wrinkles and red-rimmed eyelids. This actor, once a loyal Kent to Gielgud's King Lear, brought to senility a tart sweetness. Ralph Richardson, almost unrecognisable, showed the doctor's fire could be quenched in gentleness. Sybil Thorndike clucked over her brood of knights like a kindly and impatient mother hen, with moments of serene nostalgia in distress that caught some of the darker glints in the play's allegory of life. Irene Worth, suggesting emotion recollected in a troubled tranquillity, almost made us believe in the early suffocation of the divorcée's passions. And Megs Jenkins humanised the all too familiar frustrated spinster.

Gielgud's production, with sunlit, spick-and-span garden, cliffs and shore, was full of happy touches, though his muffled roar of waves on shingle was easily mistaken for the gale raging on the first night outside the Haymarket Theatre. Why this roar on a sandy beach in a Dorset unaccountably blessed with glassy seas and a cloudless Australian summer? It is arguable, too, whether the sunny production and stress on comedy did not mask elements in the theme profounder and sadder than on the surface appeared. Certainly this was a play that seemed better, and more moving, after a second and third visit; for the quality, though evocative, was not superficial.

A Question of Fact

While T. S. Eliot's *The Confidential Clerk* continued to pack the Lyric Theatre with its problems of heredity and vocation, a more modest but telling West End drama gave us a new angle on the subject.

Like T. S. Eliot, the author of *A Question of Fact*, Wynyard Browne, has built a play on the father-son relationship and its effects on the son's choice of profession. But in this case it is a dead father who becomes the keystone of the plot. For the father was hanged for murder; and, confronted with this fact for the first time soon after his marriage, the son has to face the inevitable psychological questionings the revelation entails.

Has he, in fact, inherited any of the father's homicidal traits? How can his pride sustain the degrading knowledge that he is sprung not only from a murderer, but a common rogue who lived by his wits? Is he, a born schoolmaster, a fit moulder of the minds and characters of the young?

The queries have point because the young schoolmaster, Paul Gardiner, is a sensitive, imaginative, neurotic being, tensely aware of his predicament, and subject to flashes of irritability and actual temper which it now appears may have a more sinister source. His loyal young wife, too, must face his quandary and if possible share it. And it is not made easier by a snobbish mother-in-law who is horrified at the squalid contacts his background may involve.

Up to this point we would seem to be watching a typical modern play of psychological cleavage which may well end in tragedy. And then, near the end of the second Act, Browne plays his ace. This is the boy's true mother, who had allowed him to be adopted as a child in an effort to save him from scandal in future life, and whom Paul now discovers to be a shop assistant in, he assumes, humble circumstances.

The entrance of the mother is the play's big moment. Contrary to expectation, she is smart, expensively dressed and eminently practical; in fact, the head of a chain of stores developed by her own brain and industry. The *éclat* was not merely the author's; for the actress of the part was Gladys Cooper, emerging like a cool water-lily from the threatening stagnant waters, and quietly taking over the play with a technique, timed to the flicker of an eyelash, which can only be compared with that of the Lunts.

The moment when this unfaded, silver-haired beauty, poised, quiet and unhurried, turned to see her son for the first time since childhood, is one of those moments in the theatre which are absolutely undecipherable, yet memorable in their impact for years afterwards. Miss Cooper, as Harold Hobson finely put it, "should be praised on the lyres of angels, and spoken of in a tongue of gold".

This tremendously moving, although almost motionless and quite speechless, piece of acting was followed by a further bombshell from the author, who after the departure of the son from the room brings down his second Act curtain with the mother's brief and rapt comment that she has been speaking to his dead father.

It is a measure of Browne's technical prowess that his third Act, unlike so many third Acts in the theatre, is the best of the three. The shattering confirmation that he is, indeed, like his father drives the son to resign from his post. But here the elegant and practical mother takes grip. In the imagination of the son she sees the shadowed imagination of the feckless but not brutal father, who committed murder in a sudden passion, to prevent her knowledge of the weakness she already understood. The same qualities turned to ill in the father she loved may be qualities turned to good in the young schoolmaster.

Her persuasive force brings the boy round. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves. . . ." And at the same time we learn, through her, the character that can be developed through suffering and experience. She, too, has moulded Fate to her own will.

The writing of this play is first-class, recognising not only progression of character through experience, but that flame to teach that may burn in some, kindling Catullus and Homer to rebirth in young, responsive minds.

Paul Scofield as the young master got both this spark that may ignite a classical education, and the tortured unpredictability of the ultra-sensitive. This was silver to Miss Cooper's gold. There was an enchantingly acted and written part of a wise and eccentric old schoolmaster, played by Harold Scott, but the auburn-haired Pamela Brown, one of our best emotional actresses, seemed unsuited to the part of the entirely normal, balanced but troubled young wife.

The Prisoner

Bridget Boland, whose play, *The Return*, with Flora Robson, achieved only a partial success in the Winter of 1953, reappeared the following April, at the Globe Theatre, as author of a play of severer contemporary content, *The Prisoner*, which marked one of Alec Guinness' rare performances on the West End stage.

The earlier play is about the return of a Nun to the world after many years of Convent life. This release from an effective prison brings its own social problems which the author does not deeply enough explore. *The Prisoner*, on the other hand, deals with the literal imprisonment of a Cardinal in a State somewhere behind the Iron Curtain, and it sustains its chosen level magnificently to the end.

It is a ruthless and uncompromising play, making no concessions to lighter West End taste. The Cardinal, who had faced Nazi torture without flinching in the same prison during the war, is now to be subjected to a very different kind of pressure by the new totalitarian Government. It is intended to discredit both himself and his Church by wringing from him a confession of moral inadequacy and treason, and Miss Boland makes a disturbing guess as to the psychiatric methods which such "confessions" entail.

The stage is divided into two sections—the Interrogator's cell and that of the Prisoner—and the action switches between these throughout and concentrates on these two characters: the trapper and the trapped. For a scene and a half the critic is himself likely to fall into a trap: that of assuming that the play will become repetitive and spring no real surprises. But Miss Boland, by a remarkable technical feat, avoids repetition and keeps suspense alive. We wait not only for the Interrogator's next move, in his attempt to pierce the moral armour of the Prisoner, but to discover for ourselves the chink in this cold, ascetic mind which will allow the Interrogator to drive home his advantage, jab at the exposed psychological nerve, and wring a complete confession born of exhaustion, loss of sleep, and this personal complex of guilt.

The Cardinal's chink is his lack of love of humanity, his own shamed awareness of it and knowledge that his rise to power was a matter of ambition and never humility. His icy pride is founded on a hatred of the flesh, springing from early life with a prostitute mother.

But before his downfall there have been many moments when it seems almost as if the Interrogator himself will be hoist with his own petard. He is a cultivated man of noble family, convinced of the rightness of his proletarian cause; but the long sessions together bring the two men strangely close. They share a common exhaustion in the ceaseless battle of wits, and in the end, as the Cardinal, broken, is contemptuously allowed to go back into the world to face his shame and disgrace, the Interrogator himself hovers near enough to defeat to doubt his own integrity, and feel forced to relinquish his office.

It is in this personal relationship that the originality of the play lies, and its only moments of compassion. Neither character is likeable: yet neither is without integrity and the loneliness it breeds. The play is, for this reason, enormously dependent on its two leading actors, and both

at the Globe Theatre were magnificent. As the Cardinal, Guinness' pale ascetism and steeled dignity, his quiet wit and slowly breaking nerve, were not more impressive than Noel Willman's smiling urbanity, probing mind and equal sense of cracking fibre. The actors met, as the men meet, as intellectual equals; and Peter Glenville enriched a simple production with some quietly revealing touches: the moment, for instance, at the end of an exhaustive interrogation when the Interrogator, at last alone, collapsed over the table, spilling a glass of water which dripped over the edge as the curtain fell.

The Sleeping Prince : Separate Tables

The Oliviers' delayed-action Coronation play, *The Sleeping Prince*, arrived at the Phoenix Theatre on 5th November, 1953, Vivien Leigh's fortieth birthday, and by far the most memorable feature of the event was the warmth of the audience's reception of this actress after her long illness. Fragile as a lily, in a blonde wig and white dress, she has never looked lovelier; and few people would not have been surprised to learn that she was a day over twenty-three.

As an American musical comedy actress in London at the time of the Coronation of King Edward VII, her wit and mischief retained their characteristic shimmer; but the play was a brittle *pièce d'occasion*, tending already to shatter like glass now the "occasion" was so distant.

It concerns a whimsical *affaire* between a Balkan Regent and the unexpectedly resistant actress; amusing in many lines, yet for so practised a dramatist as Terence Rattigan curiously irresolute in its technique. The play, in fact, ends at the curtain *before* the final scene, and the introduction of a small political bubble, resulting in a clash between the Regent and his sixteen-year-old son, the King, fails to engage our emotions. There was scope for psychological insight here, and in the growth of understanding between father and son. But Rattigan's characters remain Coronation puppets, and even the humour becomes forced before the end.

Martita Hunt was a Grand Duchess, slightly eccentric, to the manner born, and Laurence Olivier did his guttural best for the amorous Regent. But the feeling remained that he and his wife were rather wasting their talents. Too rarely indeed does Olivier, one of our

greatest classical actors, appear in a part worthy of him, and he is notoriously lacking in the ambition to improve on an earlier performance. But it is difficult to believe that there are no parts still to be conquered and placed beside his *Œdipus*, *King Lear*, *Richard III* and *Coriolanus*; and in fact in the summer of 1955 at Stratford-on-Avon his *Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*, which I could not see, apparently replaced him on the pinnacle of his former classic greatness.

Perhaps the various foreign accents accounted for the inaudibility of some of the dialogue in the Rattigan play. A quiet and dignified little performance of the boy king by Jeremy Spenser was in several ways the most interesting—because the most promising—acting on the stage. The play was lavishly decorated by Roger Furse, with a *décor* of elegant blue and blush rose.

Any new play by Terence Rattigan is now the subject of popular interest, and following this rather brittle comedy he reverted to the serious treatment of sexual themes previously explored in *The Browning Version* and *The Deep Blue Sea*. His *Separate Tables*, produced at the St. James's Theatre on 22nd September, 1954, is actually an original compromise between the full-length and one-act play. The programme consists of two separate plays, with two different leading characters in each, but both with the same setting, a Bournemouth private hotel, and the same background of permanent residents. All the characters except four, therefore, appear in the two plays.

The atmosphere of one of the cheaper boarding-houses for decaying gentry, come down in the world owing to the depletion of post-war "unearned income" and investments, was finely caught a few years before in N. C. Hunter's *Waters of the Moon*, the author of which, before this first theatrical success, had himself known hardship and the type of life depicted. Rattigan, a public-school man who hit the money jackpot early in life, has not the advantage of knowing his setting so thoroughly from bitter, yet also tolerance-making, personal experience, and this may be why the atmosphere of his establishment (where they dress for dinner, a custom not widely observed these days in more expensive establishments) does not quite ring true all the time. The real seediness, and a lot of the tiny irritations and heartache, are missing: a point emphasised by the highly West End gloss of the Tennent production and *décor* (which many hotel managements must envy).

It would be untrue to say that this West End veneer, when it occurs in the writing, seriously impedes the veracity of Rattigan's psychology and themes. It mainly does so in the suggestion of a "happy ending" to each play, a sentimentalisation of what has been an acrid sexual probing, not unmixed with compassion.

In the second play, *Table Number Seven*, which is by far the better, there is a rare attempt (for Rattigan) at serious discussion of various attitudes of mind to the social and moral ills of our time, and his picture of the bogus major, nervously facing the discovery of his police court appearance on a charge of indecent behaviour in a cinema, is truthfully and sensitively drawn. So, too, are the man's shamed awareness of his painful shyness and incurable tendencies, and the strange yet (and here Rattigan shows boldness and some psychological penetration) understandable bond which is created between him and the sexually repressed, equally shy, mother-dominated girl who has been drawn to him in the hotel.

Margaret Leighton's masterly, self-immolating portrait of this gauche, unlovely, dowdy and downtrodden spinster—prude, perhaps, more by matriarchial upbringing than instinct—certainly helped to build this character into a striking human study, pathos and deep misery continually stirring the surface. Eric Portman's stiff-legged, over-taut major was almost equally distinguished. But the play, short though it is, is a scene too long, leaving us with a not wholly credible picture of the man facing out his disgrace in the hotel dining-room, while the girl at last rebels against her monstrous and snobbish mother (a part in which the handsome Phyllis Neilson-Terry made an imposing return to the London stage).

Table By The Window, the first play, has its good moments; but the revelation that the lovely, sophisticated visitor, a model, and the heavily drinking Left Wing journalist, who was formerly a promising politician, were once disastrously married is sprung too weakly and too soon (Ibsen, whose technique far surpasses that of the sometimes overpraised Rattigan, would not have made this mistake), and their final reunion (though perhaps the dramatist intends us to realise this) encourages little belief that it will be anything short of calamitous.

These two are a little too obviously "stage types", and the girl a Narcissus-complexed butterfly whose capacity for affection is quite unbelievable apart from self-interest. Nor is it easy to be greatly

shattered by her tendency to go to pieces and take drugs at the mere thought of a lonely old age without admirers; especially as she draws a clear £1,500 a year in alimony and was played by Margaret Leighton as a still staggering beauty not beginning to show signs of her alleged forty years.

Nevertheless Miss Leighton, who must now rank as the Peggy Ashcroft of the younger generation, played the big emotional breakdown with paralysing conviction. Portman, too, was excellent, although the journalist's ability to live in a Bournemouth hotel (in any case a most unlikely choice of company and surroundings) on the proceeds from a weekly article in a Left Wing journal can only be classed as a highly optimistic figment of the author's imagination. The psychological subtleties and sensitivities of balance, so notable in the other play, are in fact lacking: it is a film plot, without overtones.

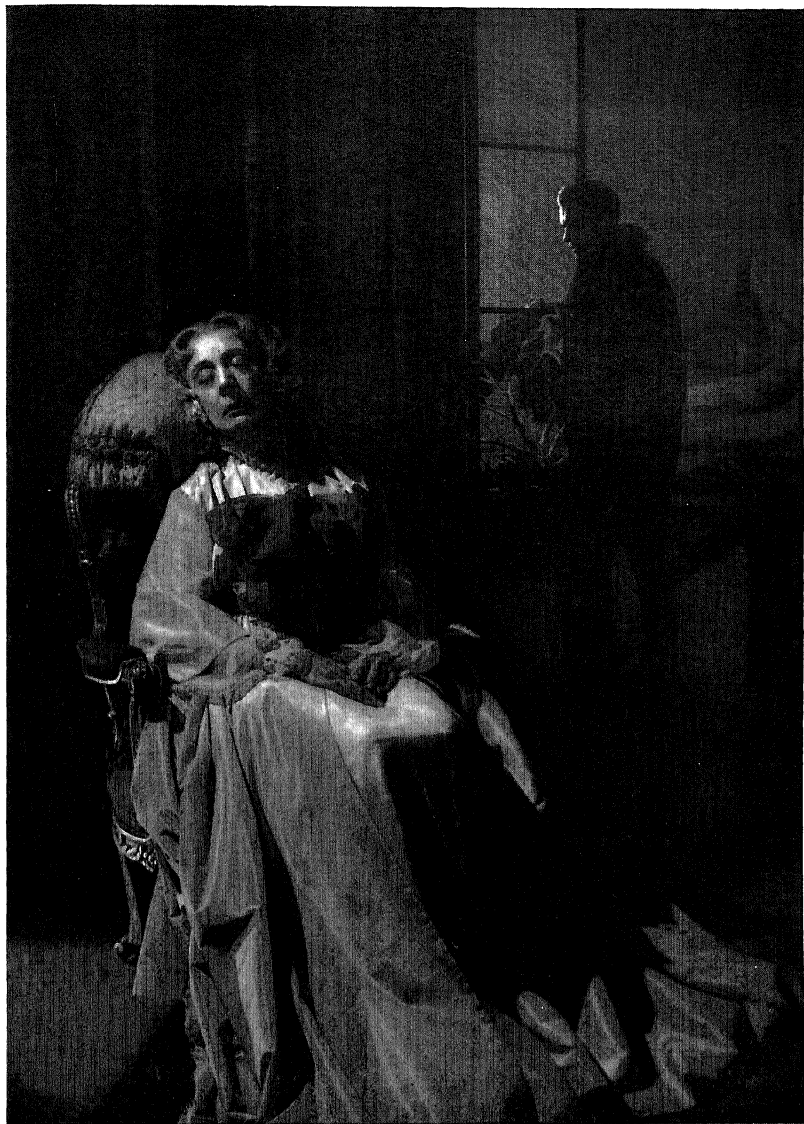
Both plays have amusing dialogue, and though not all the characters (including the fairy godmother manageress, excellently played by Beryl Measor) go much below the surface, there are some entertainingly recognisable "types" which were expertly delineated by May Hallatt, Aubrey Mather, Priscilla Morgan and others.

Misery Me! : You and Your Wife

Into the intellectual Sahara of London's Winter theatre of 1954-55 there suddenly appeared a comedy of unusual wit and intelligence.

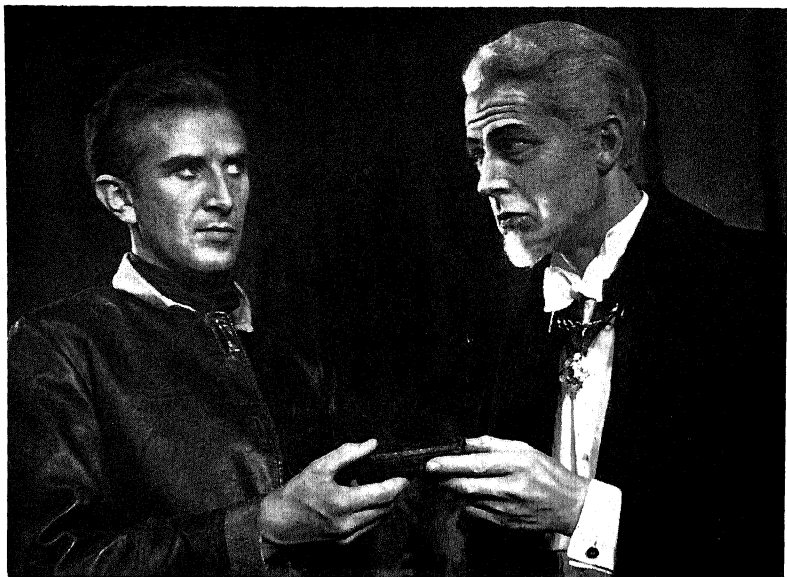
Several years previously Denis Cannan, a young actor, had shot into prominence as a playwright of ideas with his *Captain Carvalho*, a comedy in something the manner and style of Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. First produced at the Bristol Old Vic, it later achieved a good run in London with Diana Wynyard and James Donald in the leading parts.

Misery Me!, produced at the Duchess Theatre on 16th March, 1955, was Cannan's first play since *Captain Carvalho* to achieve West End presentation, and it brings to maturity much of the serious comment on life, beneath a witty exterior, that characterised the earlier play. *Captain Carvalho* jollied itself into aspects of the bedroom farce which would have surprised its intellectual inspirer, Bernard Shaw: it wavered between too many ideas and philosophies insufficiently digested. *Misery Me!* has a surer touch, moral, dramatic and philosophic; and it treats life's more suicidal romantic and political absurdities



Angus McBean

The Dark is Light Enough (Christopher Fry), Aldwych, 1954. Final scene. Edith Evans as Countess Rosmarin and James Donald as Richard Gettner.



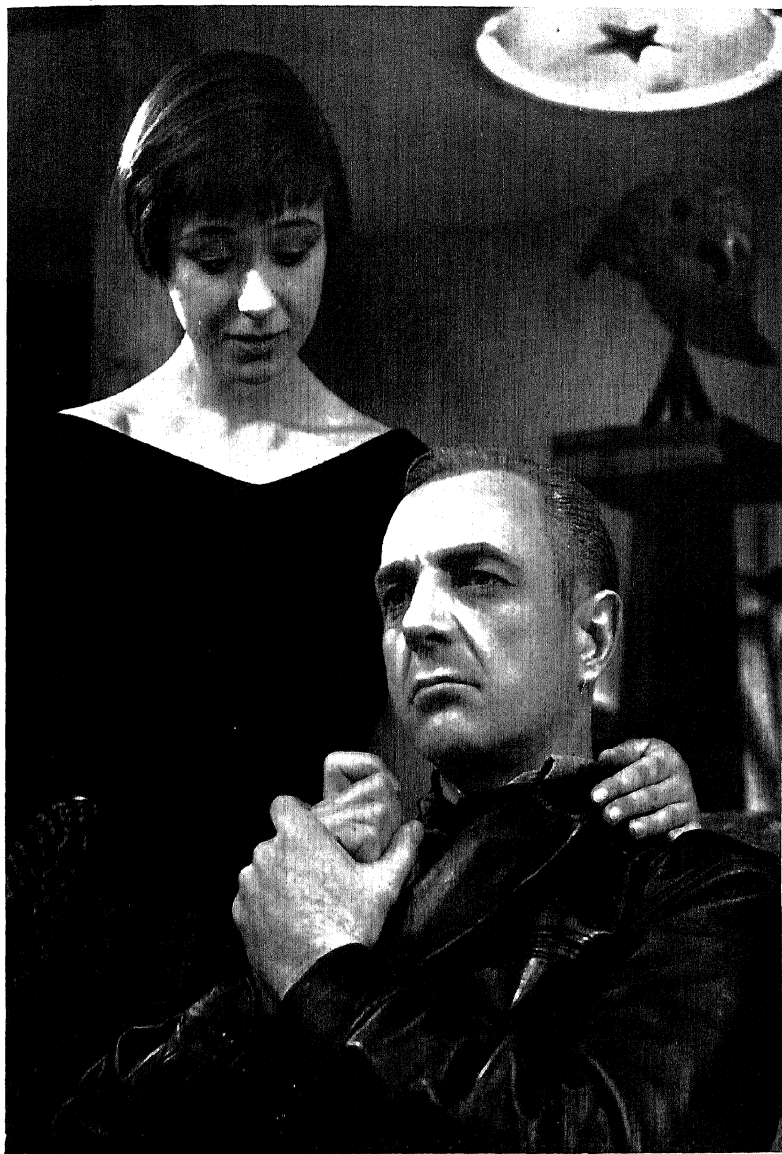
Desmond Tripp

Marching Song (John Whiting), Bristol Old Vic, 1954. Edgar Wreford (left) as General Forster and Michael Allinson as John Cadmus.



Desmond Tripp

Marching Song (John Whiting), Bristol Old Vic, 1954. Scene with (l. to r.) Edgar Wreford (Forster), Michael Allinson (Cadmus), Perlita Neilson (Dido), Mary Savidge (Catherine). Setting by Patrick Robertson.



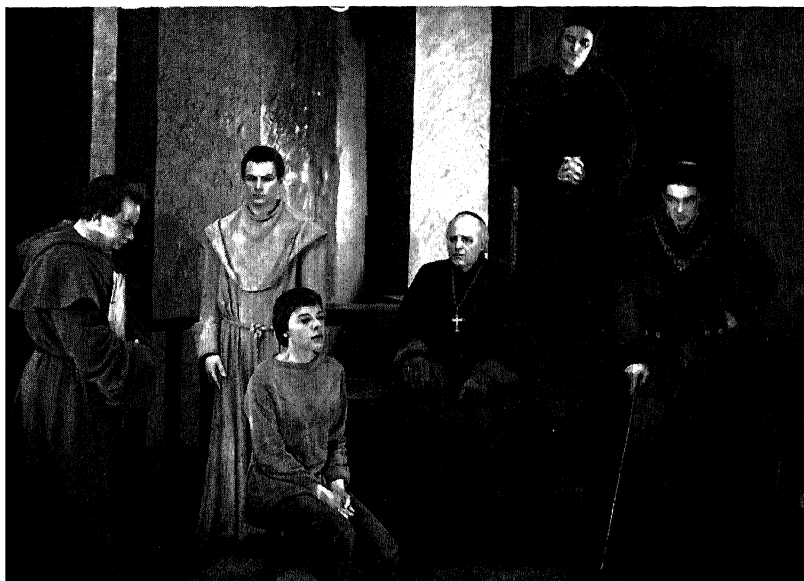
Angus McBean

Marching Song (John Whiting), St. Martin's, 1954. Robert Flemyng as General Forster with Penelope Munday as Dido Morgan.



Angus McBean

The Prisoner (Bridget Boland), Globe Theatre, 1954. Alec Guinness (left) as the Cardinal and Noel Willman as the Interrogator.



Angus McBean

The Lark (Anouilh), Lyric, Hammersmith, 1955. (L. to R.) Leo McKern (The Promotor), Michael David (Brother Ladvenu), Dorothy Tutin (Joan of Arc), Laurence Naismith (Cauchon), Michael Goodliffe (Inquisitor), Richard Johnson (Warwick).

with a warmer understanding of the love and companionship that may transcend them.

At first sight contemplated suicide may not appear an obvious target for satire and humour; but Mr. Cannan's young man fed up with the world wavers too uncertainly on the brink for us seriously to fear for him, and when he is joined by a young woman longing to get back to her rural roots from a pampered life as a business man's secretary, the young man's efforts to evade her entreaties to kill them both become not only funny but human. For the young man has obviously fallen head over heels in love, and his urge to live eventually even wins the disillusioned secretary to a preference for romance rather than self-extermination.

The play, then, with its overtones of death and conclusion with a birth—that of the innkeeper's son—is a symbol of living, the upsurge of love and the instinct of survival against all the world's contemporary difficulties and mania for self-slaughter. It is set in the imaginary territory of Arcadia, in a lonely mountain inn, and to this come, too, in pursuit of the secretary, her rich capitalist employer and his enemy in love and politics, a Left Wing revolutionary of complicated Marxist jargon.

The efforts of each of them to persuade the reluctant suicide to assassinate the other form a mainstay of the plot, and must carry an amusing echo, to lovers of Gilbert and Sullivan opera, of Ko-Ko's attempt in *The Mikado* to relieve Nanki-Poo of his difficulties in self-destruction: "Don't spoil yourself by committing suicide, but be beheaded handsomely at the hands of the Public Executioner!"

At the end we leave capital and labour fighting their eternal battle in a shooting match outside, while hotelier and doctor drink to the birth of one who in his turn, as Gilbert put it, will prove "Either a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative".

Obviously the action, and some of the characterisation, are satirical if not farcical: the root is Shavian "extravaganza", with something of Shaw's inability to depict even his political villains without a leavening of indulgent affection. Both capitalist and Left Winger find life empty without each other, and the discovery of a mutual illness for a moment almost makes them cronies. But the young people have a glow, in spite of a true love which threatens to follow the usual course. Acceptance of life's disagreements, dangers and burdens, as

well as its sudden ecstasies and companionships, is at the heart of the philosophy of this play. For pain is at the core of all pleasure, if we analyse the source of even the bacon we eat too deeply. "These deeds must not be thought After these ways; so, it will make us mad": it is Lady Macbeth's courageous commonsense (in a more ignoble cause) that the playwright echoes in a fine late speech.

The dialogue has flashes of genuine wit, and laughter at the Duchess Theatre—at least at the performance, which was not the first, that I attended—rarely failed to fill the air. Yvonne Mitchell, one of our best young serious actresses, was admirable as the play's heroine, Cornelia; turning her witty phrases with an air and giving exactly the right balance to a natural intensity which, in the way of inverted humour, flickers constantly on the edge of absurdity.

George Cole as the young man—perhaps symbolically named Adam—was not ideally cast. This was a highly amusing and well-timed performance, yet missing that edge of seriousness which would make the character—as the author obviously intended—represent the dilemma of the sensitive man in an unstable, cruel and apparently meaningless contemporary world.

There are few serious echoes in the characters of the capitalist and revolutionary, and Clive Morton and Colin Gordon played them for all the fun they were worth. Alastair Sim produced, perhaps, on slightly too farcical a note.

Following the failure of *Misery Me!* London critics had to journey to Bristol for Denis Cannan's new comedy, *You and Your Wife*, in June: a neat intellectual's paraphrase of West End divorce-comedy which played amusingly but fails quite to touch off the Shavian satire of the theme. Though the characters do not sustain our interest, the things they have to say are often witty and wise if not greatly original, and the Bristol Old Vic Company, in their last play (an odd choice for such a theatre) of the season, showed that their accomplished teamwork was not below the standards needed for a rather difficult comedy. Michael Allinson (urgently talkative as a likeable intellectual whom the dramatist failed to develop), Mary Savidge, Paul Lee, Peggy Simpson and Ronald Hines represented civilised argument, with Edgar Wreford as an unreformable and unprintable Cockney "lag" observed with great gusto and almost Dickensian care.

The Chalk Garden : The Empty Chair

It is only by devious routes that the serious new play by an English dramatist—even a dramatist already well known—normally reaches London. Enid Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden*, which was unsuccessfully peddled around the West End managements, reached the Haymarket Theatre in 1956 via New York, with Dame Edith Evans and Peggy Ashcroft in the parts created in America by Gladys Cooper and Siobhan McKenna; and Peter Ustinov's new play, *The Empty Chair*, received production the same Spring at the Bristol Old Vic but has not at the time of writing been seen in London.

The Chalk Garden, written in a witty ornamental style which is a garden of metaphor, and frequently suggests blank verse in the Christopher Fry tradition, is a story of eccentrics in a country house on the Sussex Downs, invaded by a governess who is the one really living character with a basis of poignancy.

Her mysterious past, not unforeseen, is revealed to be prison life as a reprieved murderess, about whose crime there is still a shadow of doubt; her present interest is horticulture and things of young growth, like the adolescent granddaughter of the head of the household who is a mass of Freudian egoisms and cannot flower to truer life in this chalky, uncultivable soil.

Both themes have their interest, although the play, after an absorbing two Acts, fails to develop and enrich itself, to grow from its own intellectual soil. It is sustained by dialogue of constant wit and occasional wisdom, and by the brilliant playing of Edith Evans and Peggy Ashcroft as the shallow, eccentric grandmother and the ex-prisoner.

Edith Evans' style, volatile as champagne, full-blown as a summer rose, found an inviting vehicle as the selfishly dominating Mrs. St. Maugham, whose Edwardian charm still ravishes and ravages the plants, human and horticultural, that wilt in her chalk-arid soil. But it is possible a less individualistic personality might find more of granite in the part, and the play truly belonged to Peggy Ashcroft, whose governess, faintly stuttering, square-set, green-fingered in spite of her lack of charm, was the superb character study of a woman warped physically, but not spiritually, by a harsh and sheltered experience of life.

Peter Ustinov's *The Empty Chair*, which he describes as "An Anatomy of Revolution", takes with less obvious metaphor the wider theme of the abuse of power and its self-destruction.

Set in the French Revolution, with Danton and Robespierre as its leading figures, it should not, writes the author, "be considered a mere reproduction of events but rather as a commentary on the psychology of revolution in general". It takes place in an unspecified room overlooking the route of the tumbrils to the guillotine, and the empty chair of the title is a royal one about which ranges the sinister legend that whoever sits in it is the next victim for liquidation.

Hébert, Danton and Robespierre in turn, blind to legend, sink into it and clutch its death-gilded arms; at the end, Barras, the lesser man, evades it. But revolution has run its course, and a new Emperor looms.

Dramatically this is one of Ustinov's most skilful plays yet; helped by three Charwomen as Chorus of the People, his narrative proceeds on a wash of vigorous talk spiced by irony of phrase and situation. His wit stings, not the less because, as a character remarks, "A revolution cannot afford a sense of humour". One interpolated character, "a spy with a soul" called Mouche, is the mouthpiece of much of this irony and was acted with wry saturnity by Derek Godfrey, a young actor, trained in the Old Vic Dramatic School, who had recently played an outstanding Mr. Antrobus in *The Skin of Our Teeth* and was obviously a character actor to watch—entirely at home in middle age and with a dry sense of sardonic humour which stood him in good stead, later, as the Professor of Greek in Shaw's *Major Barbara*.

There is a dramatic compulsion in this narrative and a clash of character that override the conference-table setting, and would have done so more emphatically in a less static and better-played production. But about Joseph O'Connor's Danton, and Alan Dobie's cold and implacable Robespierre, white-lipped in resentment and magnificently timed, there can be small doubt: the actors could hardly be bettered, even though Dobie just failed to streak his resentment with the pathos of the man in whom Jeanne Duplay found an unexpected tenderness.

John Humphry as the sardonic, insolent Barras and Peter O'Toole in a savage few moments as Hébert come out best of the rest. The women's parts are not large, but Phyllida Law had a striking scene as Danton's avenging wife, and Eve Watkinson, Molly Tapper and Moira Shearer were excellently contrasted as the three Norn-like Chars.

IV

SAINTHOOD AND WITCHCRAFT

Two Saint Joans : McKenna and Bergman

ALMOST concurrently with the first publication in English of Lucien Fabre's biography of Joan of Arc, the London theatre developed a striking obsession with the same character. During the Autumn of 1954 we heard Siobhan McKenna speak the part with an Irish accent in Shaw's play at the Arts Theatre, while Ingrid Bergman suggested a Joan of Swedish origin in the Honegger-Claudé music-drama, *Joan of Arc at the Stake*, at the Stoll. And in the New Year a third Joan was promised, presumably this time with an English accent; although it seemed quite on the cards that Dorothy Tutin, who was to play Joan in an English version of Anouilh's Paris success, *L'Alouette*, might acknowledge the nationality of the saint and her dramatist, and let us hear a Joan in authentic Domrémy.

Joan was a peasant, and Sybil Thorndike merely followed Shaw's instructions in giving her speech the windswept tang of our English Yorkshire Moors. But Shaw was an Irishman by birth, and the Irish Catholic peasantry today is perhaps closer than most modern communities, in its faith and religious outlook, to mediæval Lorraine. The sprinkling of the brogue in the Arts Theatre production therefore not only realised an inherent national rhythm in Shaw's prose, but gave a notably authentic atmosphere to the lower orders in the play.

Siobhan McKenna's Joan, black-haired, barefoot and in a plain brick-red dress, was an Irish lass who conveyed the elemental force of the character: a Pegeen Mike with a vision, and the passion to make it real. It was a performance with splashes of splendour, yet too emphatic to unweave all the threads in the tapestry of Joan's complex soul.

The Dunois, Peter Wyngarde, a young actor of presence, caught a glint of the wonder and imagination in the play, especially in the scenes on the Loire and at Rheims, when Shaw makes us conscious of the wind of heaven ruffling our hair. Excellent, too, was Douglas Wilmer's Warwick: a tall, auburn-haired figure with the elegance of

the courtier, the long hands of the connoisseur, and the quiet, unhurried, dangerous speech of the practised and unscrupulous diplomat. Every glance in this performance was a sword-thrust expertly judged, every vocal inflexion, languid or sharp, drove the point home. The character, in a way unmatched since Andrew Cruickshank played the part, became in the hands of this highly intelligent actor the essence of the intellectual argument of the play, as well as its feudal spokesman.

The Epilogue, often criticised, was the most imaginative passage of a production necessarily restricted by the economy and small size of the theatre, and not moving easily to the St. Martin's Theatre later. Here Shaw's poignant irony found a piercing echo, and the loneliness of Joan became a symbol of the humanity which has made the play last.

Shaw's drive to the political and religious springs of the tragedy is outside the scope of most dramatists, who have not the same sociological background or intellectual range. The Honegger work stands by its music rather than Paul Claudel's text, which like Fabre gives Joan's accusers the animalism of hot prejudice. This is expressed in Claudel's case through satiric and grotesque ballets, unfortunately too lacking in dæmonism, in the Stoll Theatre production, to make any dramatic effect. Only in Joan's speeches on the beauty of Normandy, and the cold of Winter yielding to the bloom of Spring, do we catch a glimpse of poetry and the spiritual core of the theme.

Yet the music, choral and orchestral, is impressive enough to bind the work, with the narrative seeming an integral part of the score, not just the illogical speech of an actress among singers. And Roberto Rossellini's production supplemented the aural with the visual, placing Joan in a white light against a star-pricked sky, or moving bewildered, at point of death, among billowing mists; mustering his groups in coloured pyramids variously lit; and using photo-montage on the back-cloth with effect when the subject was a cathedral, but much less happily when it was the heavenly host or a pastoral inset.

One was not moved as one had hoped; but Joan's joining in the dances of the children had the simplicity of true pathos, and when at the stake she burst her chains, and alone on the blackened stage lifted her free hands to heaven, we shared something of her triumph and her burning ecstasy.

A lack of stage technique gave uncertainty to some of Ingrid Bergman's performance: an onlooker at the side of the stage, she did

not seem absorbed in the character, or make her presence strongly felt. But in the heart of the action, she was fine indeed; radiant, strong, a true daughter of the morning. Her voice is a good one, capable of power and intensity, and charm, beauty and unforced emotion made this a touching and memorable portrayal.

The Third Joan : " The Lark "

Jean Anouilh's much-heralded play on Joan, *The Lark*, arrived at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on 11th May, 1955, in a glittering but cogent translation by Christopher Fry and a simple, sombre production by Peter Brook.

Brook used the bare wooden framework of Jean-Denis Malclès' setting as a permanent, expressionistic background to his economic groupings of characters, and achieved dramatic climax, not through pictorialism, but the voices of his actors and the clear-cut, throbbing musical theme which—if memory does not deceive—was also extracted from a Vivaldi-Bach concerto by Jean Cocteau for his wonderfully imaginative film, *Les Enfants Terribles*.

Cocteau used this music with a dramatic flair amounting to genius, and if Brook picked his brains the result fully justified him. The Joan in this production was simply clad throughout in a grey jerkin and peasant's slacks; a boyish, timeless emphasis. No silver gleam of armour, no pillions of heraldry, no throne-room pomp. The characters moved in and out of a skeleton construction of Joan's trial, free of time and chronology, re-enacting former scenes of her life and commenting on them. Only at the end did the darkly-lit stage flood with sunlight, as Joan attends once again the Coronation of the Dauphin at Rheims which was her greatest triumph and the apex of her mission. She has stepped down from the stake to do so: for hers, explains her scrupulous and compassionate judge, Cauchon, is " a story with a happy ending ", and on this note any play about her must end.

The originality of the play is in this unrealistic technique, not usual in historical plays and what mainly distinguishes it from Shaw's greater drama. It owes something to Thornton Wilder, including a naïve insistence on the fact that this is a stage representation, not the living story.

Outside its technique and obvious historic derivatives (both Shaw and Anouilh used the same source material for the Trial, which accounts for some identical lines of dialogue), Anouilh owes more to Shaw than his Parisian audiences and critics probably realised. This is specially evident in the characterisation of Warwick and the Dauphin, both of whom resemble Shaw's re-creations more than their historic models.

Warwick in particular has little in common with the Richard Beauchamp who achieved high honour in England as one of the noblest of our statesmen, and the wise guide and preceptor of the young King, Henry VI. As in Shaw, he is an unscrupulous diplomat and spokesman, in twentieth-century terms, of feudal political expedience; with some tart satire on the English which seems diverted from Shaw's de Stogumber, but must be accounted forgivable in a French dramatist writing, with natural bias, on a nation which invaded his country. His cynical turn and wit are wholly Shavian; but Anouilh in a nice touch humanises him in a revealing little scene with Joan in prison, though even here his repugnance to witness her execution echoes a line of Shaw's.

In the second half of the play something more vividly and substantially Anouilh's own emerges (though his descent from the stake surely owes something to Claudel?). He had failed to convince in his version of Joan's meeting with de Baudricourt, a satirical scene which plays amusingly but tends to weaken Joan's mystic force and invest her with too knowing an approach to psychology and sex. But his Inquisitor is different from Shaw's and highly dramatic: a black-robed fanatic played by Michael Goodliffe with a hawk-like beak and talon and an obsessed eye, palely and balefully evoking the accusing terror of the Inquisition. Many of the speeches here are fine and barbed with thought and understanding. If the play lacks Shaw's intellectual stature and (curiously) his tragic poetry, it is still a play of high quality by London's standards today.

It was also superbly acted and spoken. Laurence Naismith as Cauchon divested himself of his Churchillian pugnacity in *The Burning Glass* (in which Goodliffe had played the young scientist, Christopher Terriford), and exuded an urgent gentleness; Donald Pleasence's Dauphin avoided caricature and suggested a clear brain in a lazy body; Richard Johnson gave Warwick a crinkle-eyed, superficial charm; and Michael David, the granite-like young Nazi Captain of *Marching Song*,

achieved a telling, unstrained immobility and goodness as Brother Ladvenu.

Dorothy Tutin's Joan was rather unfairly compared with that of Siobhan McKenna in the Shaw play, simultaneously playing in the West End. There is no true basis of comparison owing to the differences in the dramatists' conception. Anouilh's Joan is the lark, the herald of the morn of individual freedom of mind and her own sainthood; gayer than Shaw's, but with no less passionate a belief in her voices, if a little less confidence in her fitness for her task as soldier.

Dorothy Tutin gave her a radiant absorption, and once again proved herself the most intensely emotional and moving of our actresses under thirty.

Contrasts in Witchcraft : " Bell, Book and Candle " and " The Crucible "

The English theatre in the Autumn of 1954 suddenly became a cauldron of witches. In October we saw two Joan of Arcs burned for witchcraft at the stake; and in October and early November two further plays lit very different fires in London and Bristol.

John Van Druten's *Bell, Book and Candle*, like Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, came to us from New York: this, apart from its subject, was its only link with the Bristol Old Vic production of the Miller play, which had a full, and on the whole excited, London Press at its first English performance on 9th November, 1954. For while *The Crucible* is a historical play founded on fact and sustained on an intense note of tragic hysteria, *Bell, Book and Candle* deals lightly with a witches' coven in modern Knightsbridge.

Van Druten's is a frail but fairly amusing affair with a final touch of fairy-tale charm, when Lilli Palmer's decorative witch, who has put her spell on a young man, finds herself possessed by human feeling and glad that her powers have forsaken her. An expert cast of five—Miss Palmer supported by Rex Harrison, Athene Seyler, Wilfrid Lawson and David Evans—kept this wispy candleflame alight, though neither Lilli Palmer nor Rex Harrison, polished technicians though they are, quite probed the pathos beneath the surface or bewitched us with the fairy-tale ending. Harrison's production, however, was wittily inventive and lost nothing later on tour when Robert Flemyng and Joan Greenwood took over the two leading rôles.

The Crucible flared beside this nightlight with the white heat of human diabolism. It is freely based on the notorious witch trials of 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts, when nineteen honest citizens were hanged for dealings with the devil, and innumerable others imprisoned, in a panic started by hysterical young girls who testified themselves possessed through the satanic influences of their neighbours.

But Miller's play is not wholly historical: it has a contemporary parallel and warning. "The Salem tragedy", he has written, "developed from a paradox. It is a paradox in which we still live, and there is no prospect yet that we will discover its resolution. Simply, it was this: for good purposes, even high purposes, the people of Salem developed a theocracy, a combine of state and religious power whose function was to keep the community together and prevent any kind of disunity that might open it to destruction by material or ideological enemies. . . . Evidently the time came in New England when the repressions of order were heavier than seemed warranted by the dangers against which the order was organised. The witch hunt was a panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn toward greater individual freedom."

It is no secret that the modern parallel in the author's mind was the political witch-hunts of Senator McCarthy. But the similarity is not really a strong one and the play lives in its own right as a frightening dramatic record of the inhumanity which may spread, in all ages, from mass hysteria and panic. For sheer cruelty and stupidity the Salem witch trial must take its place among the most degrading spectacles of apparent civilisation. And it is Miller's strength that he has given the material dramatic shape, and by selecting three key characters (two of them created, one—the malevolent girl Abigail Williams—historical) ignited our interest not only in the theme but in individual psychology.

In *The Crucible* Abigail begins the witch hunt to trap the wife of a young farmer, John Proctor, who in a moment of temptation seduced her but now clings, in mingled remorse and resentment, to his cold yet loyal wife. Her denunciation sends the good woman to prison; he in turn, frantic to save his wife and others, admits their adultery and the girl's motive in open court; and by a whip-lash turn of dramatic irony the wife, who does not know this, condemns her husband by defending his good name.

The mixture of exorcism, revivalist hysteria, pretended possession and blinded justice, combining to further private grudges and public fanaticism, is presented by the dramatist with masterly excitement. It is a play like a screaming nerve, and the Old Vic presentation, in a superb production by Warren Jenkins and baleful, expressionistic settings dominated by dark woods, a gallows and streaked, thundery skies, matched the climaxes with a thrilling team-work.

The language has a biblical ring of metaphor, graphically in period; and though the play at the end, with Proctor's recantation, comes near enough to *Saint Joan* to make us conscious of its principal lack—Shaw's intellectual grasp of the wider issues—its dramatic impact, failing only here, has already been made and sustained with unremitting power.

Edgar Wreford gave the tormented passion of a Heathcliff to the wronged and spiritually courageous John Proctor: a strong and anguished performance by a rapidly rising actor. Rosemary Harris as the wife, surprisingly but by no means ineffectively cast, was a moving quiet centre in the maelstrom, and Perlita Neilson as the malleable and hysterical young girl, Mary Warren, John Kidd as the Judge, Danforth, Michael Allinson as the disturbed young pastor, John Hale, Barbara Assoon, one of the Bristol Old Vic Dramatic School's West Indian students, as the terrified negress Tituba, and Paul Lee, superbly gnarled and rich in character as the oldest inhabitant, Giles Corey, stood out in a long cast which, in spite of the play's emotional demands, had remarkably few weaknesses. Pat Sandys, a guest actress, played Abigail, giving her a white-faced, auburn-haired, chilling intensity, but not perhaps probing sufficiently deeply into the hidden streaks of sensuality and madness in this complex and terrifying character.

Whether the West End could stomach this powerful tragedy seemed dubious, and no management at the time, in spite of the impressive notices, risked it; but it lit a bonfire in Bristol which reddened the sky of theatrical London.

Darkling Child

The Arts Theatre, although it has no regular company but uses different actors for each production, is London's nearest equivalent to a general repertory theatre of high standard. Having to reach only a Club audience it can concentrate on those serious plays on which the

West End commercial theatre is unlikely to take a risk, and in February 1956 it produced a first play written by a rising young poet, W. S. Merwin, in collaboration with his wife, Dido Milroy.

Certainly this was a play that required production, if only to give the authors an opportunity to study its technical faults on the stage. For *Darkling Child* shows by no means a negligible dramatic talent, and with more cohesion and clarity of psychological motive it might have fired the stage in a similar way to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

It provided a splendid part for a leading young actress in the character of Agnes Whitcross, a girl in Restoration England with a passionate desire for religious reformation, but vividly aware of her own youthful background under the domination of an older woman practising witchcraft. She is torn equally by this religious fanaticism, which may or may not spring from an unadmitted attachment to a young Puritan minister, and a devotion to her atheist Royalist father which the preacher suggests to her is evil in its source.

She then poisons the father, presumably to satisfy the preacher, although the motivation is never made wholly clear, and is psychologically incredible because stupid. It is a weakness of the play, dramatically, that her trial for murder takes place off-stage, after an unlikely denunciation by a baffled lover. She is acquitted, after denying the charge, and as love at last flares between her and the minister she revolts him by her confession. He flees, leaving her once again ensnared by the forces of witchcraft, and savagely flinging after him an agonised defiance and accusation of his own responsibility.

Evil exists because human beings will not understand or help the afflicted; the actions of the good reflect on those they condemn, and therefore create evil where none might have developed. This seems to be the theme of this powerful last speech, by far the most impressive moment in the play. Witches are made by men: "We will be with you till the end of the world!"

The moment was seized with tremendous force by Margaret Whiting, a young actress from the Liverpool Repertory Company who made an impact on London in this part. Certainly she had natural gifts and possibilities: strength of emotion, fine expressive dark eyes, a powerful though not as yet flexible voice. Her technique was less certain and marred by facial mannerisms, too much restlessness and

tension. She was more exciting and impressive than moving, but the material at least of which tragic actresses are made.

The play suffered otherwise from unimaginative and slow production and a company much below the frequent Arts Theatre standard. The long part of the father, a complex character, was in particular inadequately played and unequal to a death scene in any case too prolonged for dramatic tension. Jane Henderson, a fine character actress, seemed baffled by the part of the witch, which was played or produced too skittishly to be truly sinister, and needed literary development. Diana Fairfax gave the best of the minor performances in a brilliantly bizarre sketch of a younger witch girl.

The minister, Anthony Newlands, showed not uninteresting qualities, but again was hampered by the authors' lack of real development of the character. Psychologically, one feels, more might be made of possible jealousy of motive behind his dislike of the girl's love of her father; but this not inconsiderable theme peters out in the profuse literary language of the play. Revised and developed, this play might yet be shaped into a striking, moving and disturbing work.

GIRAUDOUX, BETTI AND "THE TEMPEST"

Contrasts in Fantasy : "The Enchanted" and "The Tempest"

THE siren lure of the tale of magic to the dramatist has taken many forms, and been adapted to as many attitudes of mind. From the romantic sentimentalities of Barrie to the intellectual paradox of G. K. Chesterton is a long step; but not longer than from the satirical fantasies of Jean Giraudoux to Shakespeare's mystic "book of revelation" and final play, *The Tempest*.

Giraudoux is a French dramatist whose unpredictability and lack of convention have made his plays hard to transplant to English soil. His uproarious Olympian *Amphitryon* 38 came to us via America, with the fabulous Lunts to give its glittering sophistications a glow of tenderness at the core. His *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, a crazy solution to the problem of the world's evil, did not, however, repeat its Paris success here, in spite of the inspired lunatic logic of Martita Hunt as the flower-bedecked disintegrating Ophelia, and wonderful settings by Christian Bérard.

The Enchanted (a new title for *Intermezzo*, performed here privately many years ago) is a gentler, more beguiling piece with which the small but adventurous Arts Theatre in April 1954 had a "house full" success. It is as flighty as a butterfly, and as difficult to pin down.

At one moment we are in a world of happy satire of French local government, a world in which the advent of a "ghost" has produced a topsy-turvydom which might almost be described as Gilbertian. There is a lovely and innocent heroine preaching a doctrine of acceptance of Nature to a chorus of schoolgirls, and having Barriresque encounters with the "ghost". A finely calculated sense of mystery pervades the second Act, when the supposed "ghost"—not a dead man at all—is shot and becomes a true and rather menacing apparition. The last Act is a prolonged exorcism, in which the heroine is rescued from the beckoning magic of death by a discovery of the enchantments

of Civil Service life, as propounded by a handsome young Weights and Measures official in a speech with the sly wit of the unexpected.

The play is a little slow to get going, and needs more wit; but it was charmingly produced by John Fernald at the Arts in settings by Fanny Taylor which captured a blue haze of lakeside enchantment. A good cast was headed by Valerie Hanson, Richard Warner, Lionel Jeffries and Emrys Jones.

"But we are spirits of another sort", as one of Shakespeare's immortals puts it; and one of the traps into which the modern ballet-minded producer may fall is to treat Prospero's "rough magic" with all the pantomimic elaboration still possible in the fairy world of the author's youthful *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

This is a trap into which the usually excellent producer, Robert Helpmann, seemed to me to fall in his production of *The Tempest* at the Old Vic, during that same Spring in which we saw the Giraudoux fantasy at the Arts. With luxuriant *décors* by Leslie Hurry (but what of the "barren" island?) and much ingenuity in vanishing masques and surprise entrances, he evolved something which, although it gave the eyes much of delight to feed on, was starvation diet to the mind and spirit which beat at the heart of this play; a play so unsatisfactory in some ways dramatically, yet recognisable to great writers of four centuries as a culmination of Shakespeare's genius in poetry and vision.

Something of the spiritual source of Prospero's authority the producer hinted at: rightly he gave him the stage, darkened and without encumbrances, for the two great mystic speeches and Epilogue. But the monstrous materialisation of Prospero's "book"—the allegory, it may be, of Shakespeare's own genius and renunciation of it with this play—did not help our imagination, nor the gorgeous panoply of Prospero's own robes assist us to understand this man who is a studious mystic trying to search to the heart of the world's mystery, feeling the pain of a Christ at the unconquered Caliban-like evil in man, and shaken with the prophetic vision of the great globe which

". . . shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind."

Michael Hordern, crowning a triumphant Old Vic season which he dominated as an actor, fought valiantly against an isle only too "full

of noises ” and transformation scenes, and gave a Prospero of authority and bitter anger, perhaps too little yielding to the sheer visionary music of the part (Gielgud remains incomparable here). John Neville as Ferdinand was a still centre of poetry in the maelstrom, and Claire Bloom, auburn-haired and clothed in what seemed like a transparent rainbow, was a Miranda as strangely beautiful as W. H. Hudson’s Rima in *Green Mansions*. The rest seemed ill at ease, as if Helpmann’s direction of character were looser than of wont; not even Richard Burton, a fearsome anthropoid Caliban, really managing to suggest the stirring depths of human character that can make the great Caliban moving.

“*The Enchanted*” in Repertory : “*Tiger at the Gates*”

It is a curious historical effect of the fashion for Anouilh’s plays in the English theatre that it has aroused a belated interest in the works of his acknowledged master, Jean Giraudoux, even although these are now many years old, and in most cases have not before been presented in England.

The success of *The Enchanted* at the Arts Theatre in 1954 was followed by a number of repertory productions of the play, notably by Douglas Seale at Birmingham, where the sensitive young actress Doreen Aris played the young girl, and by Frank Dunlop at the Bristol Old Vic, where Rosemary Harris’ heroine and Edgar Wreford’s Doctor—*deus ex machina* of the action—crystallised the poignant magic of the play in performances of style and poetry.

Wreford’s conception, in fact, of his small but vital part gave new undercurrents to the fantasy, making of the tolerant and compassionate doctor a Prospero of the French provinces, conjuring life, like some quivering Ariel, out of the blue twilight of the misted lake—his tuning fork a wand, and his music the dying daydreams of a young girl passing to womanhood.

This scene was beautifully played, with a sense of poetry and the *fey* not before marked in this young actor of varied striking force. Dignity, irony, an autumn mellowness, distinguished one of those performances of quality that are among the rare small perfections of the English theatre, but are not always within the range of the front-rank star Wreford promises to become.

Yet the play often hinges on them; and most notably in this fantastic

comedy of Giraudoux's, in which some occasionally forced humour, with at its best a Gilbertian sense of satire and inversion, delicately balances on the edge of pathos and the mysteries of destiny.

Destiny, too, is the theme, on a far more heroic scale, of *Tiger at the Gates*, the Christopher Fry translation of *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*, which, with Michael Redgrave as Hector, was produced at the Apollo Theatre on 2nd June, 1955.

But destiny, here, is not the capricious flying bird of a young girl's affections on awakening from adolescence; it is a tiger lurking to spring, the menacing striped shadow of war that looms at the gates of rich and prosperous Troy, and darkens the Ægean turquoise that hung in Loudon Sainthill's setting, like some vast translucent jewel, where sea and sky meet.

Hector, the hero and dominating force of the play, is its man of destiny who alone sets himself against the onrush of the tiger. He has the women behind him; but the men think only of Helen and retaining this beauty within their gates, unheeding of the warning that beauty—whether of woman, arts or civilisation—can only be purchased at a price.

Helen herself is not scaled to tragic destiny, and it is one of the ironies of the play—exposed in a fine scene with the ardent and devoted wife to Hector, Andromache—that the shallowness of her alliance with Paris does not even justify poetically the epic tragedy that will spring from it. But Helen nevertheless, as the shrewd Greek Ulysses remarks, is one of those "hostages of Fate" by which destiny achieves its ends, and which no power of man can avert.

Throughout the play, and Hector's exciting battle for peace, there runs this ominous thread. Ulysses, stepping ashore to treat with "the essential brotherhood of enemies" before battle, sees the Trojan landscape as "the colour of storm". "But still with each victory the prize escapes me!" is Hector's own cry, reiterated during the play.

"There's not going to be a Trojan War!" is Andromache's first line that opens the play. And Cassandra's sardonic salute to Homer magnificently ends it. "The Trojan poet is dead. And now the Grecian poet will have his word."

Only once—at the beginning of the second half—does Giraudoux's characteristic brand of sex satire seriously release the tension of the theme. It does prevent full roundness of human character (though not

of human tolerance and wisdom), but this is partly because Hector is so much the mainspring of the action: the mental and emotional heart-beat to which the others provide only the pulse. It is a superb heart, and only a superb actor could test its full blood-course and feeling. Michael Redgrave is more than a superb actor, he has in recent years verged on a great one; and this performance, authoritative, ironic and deeply moving, gave him a classical and emotional stature few of our time can even approach.

Walter Fitzgerald's Ulysses, highly praised by some critics, seemed to me not to match Redgrave with sufficient emotional force or philosophy in their great scene together, and although Lueen McGrath had the right fine-boned face and stance for Cassandra, she lacked voice for a true suggestion of the prophetess. Barbara Jefford's classic beauty as Andromache was allied to great gentleness and tender grace of playing, and Catherine Lacey showed exactly what might have been done with Hecuba had the dramatist only allowed it. Diane Cilento's Helen, honey-blond of hair, skin and costume, seemed to me to meet the play's demands in loveliness and wit: this is not the Helen of legend, the launcher of a thousand ships, but a Helen "hostage of Fate" whose baby-faced hedonism, indifferent to politics, is not without the core of commonsense in self-interest and, living for the moment, foresees the lonely future of the fading beauty with admirable clarity and without fuss.

The male cast, including John Laurie's viciously ridiculous poet, was hampered by the overpowering impact of Hector and the author's failure to give the tragic theme full scope without the intrusion of character-burlesque.

The Burnt Flower-Bed

The Italian dramatist Ugo Betti, who was also a Judge and died a few years ago, although widely admired throughout Europe, was unknown in England until the performance of several of his many plays on the B.B.C. Third Programme. One of them, *The Queen and the Rebels*, was subsequently performed by the Midland Theatre Company in Coventry and in the Autumn of 1955 in London. A light comedy, *Summertime*, also had an Autumn production, with Geraldine McEwan and Dirk Bogarde in the leading parts.

In the meantime, on 9th September, 1955, to the adventurous Arts

Theatre Club fell the honour of presenting a Betti play for the first time in London. Translated in cogent prose by Henry Reed under the title of *The Burnt Flower-Bed*, it was played by a small excellent cast of well-known actors, and did much to establish Betti's claim to be a dramatist of remarkable powers.

Having something in common intellectually with the *Marching Song* of the young English dramatist John Whiting, it is not an easy play to assimilate at first hearing. Like all great plays it has an element of symbolism, a universal significance concentrated in this case in contemporary human and political problems, which reach out beyond the immediate to the social anxieties of all time. It covers an enormously wide range of thought, and it is only after a second viewing that one comes to realise how little of diffuseness this actually involves, and how cunningly the links in the intellectual chain are welded.

The technical affinity to Ibsen in Betti's work has been much commented on, although in fact this play lacks (perhaps partly owing to a slow production with too many "significant" pauses between cues) that unbreakable inner tension which is so fascinating a feature of Ibsen's style. The line back into the enigmatic past is there, but its tautness fluctuates and the tension tends to relax.

The closest affinity in this play is to *Rosmersholm*, in which the human problem also devolves on a suicide before the play begins; but where every subsequent revelation in the Ibsen play is an illumination and development of the character of Rebecca West, the dénouement in *The Burnt Flower-Bed* does not increase our knowledge of the two characters concerned—the father and mother of the dead boy. The effect, in fact, is not psychological but intellectual, and the symbol one of wider significance than the immediately individual. The boy has died because, in this world torn by pessimism and dissension, "the children", as his father cries, "do not want to live". It is, perhaps, a forced plea: our disbelief is not suspended. But the power of the symbol strikes magnificently home, and that is doubtless the secret of Betti's absorbing hold on the minds of playgoers in the theatre.

We come to see that although the Ibsenesque human problem and the larger political one seem at first sight a cleavage in the style of the play, they are, in fact, conjoined spiritually and mentally.

The father of the boy and protagonist of the play, simply designated as "John" (most universal of names), is an ex-revolutionary leader

who has retired from the presidency of his country following an internal party conflict. His son was found dead on a flower-bed, apparently fallen from a window, at about the same time, and both the father and neurotically unbalanced mother seem tortured by a sense of possible guilt regarding the secret of his death.

Alongside this personal theme runs a political one. To the house of the retired leader in the mountains, close to the frontier, comes a delegation of his former colleagues, intent, to outward view, on obtaining his presence at a peace-meeting with "the other side". The two themes converge, as has been said, into a common one, the need for renewed faith and a realisation of the self-respect and importance of the individual.

"Give him great, great hopes—he needs them, especially if he is young"—"Do not strip them of their pride": this is the crux of the great speech of the ex-leader in which he reveals his changed ideas from the isolation of ironic detachment. Human beings cannot escape their responsibility, although they may sometimes exaggerate it: "We put our signature on the epoch" is the fine reply to a plea that our ills come from the nature of the violent contemporary world.

To the sinister principal of the revolutionary deputation, once the wheels of political expedience are set in motion, destiny takes over and the world moves to its fate "like clockwork". A young girl, of stronger religious faith than the rest, has to die to disprove it. But when she does so the wheel turns, and with a new hope in the logical human desire for peace the ex-leader carries her body over to the frontier, the others following as in a Pirandello dream.

Where there might, owing to the clockwork of a political double-crossing, have been a new world catastrophe, there shines at least the vision of individual pride and understanding.

Responsibility, in fact, is a major theme of this fine play, which would grip the mind even more if its dramatic climaxes were a little less delayed. The second Act is remarkable, and was splendidly grasped by Alexander Knox as the ex-leader with a new sense of articulate sincerity after the years of political rant.

Esmé Percy as an aged weakling brought a flash of bravura to the general naturalism—an exquisite performance—and Leo McKern as the principal delegate had a rapping force in the last Act. Dudy Nimmo as the young girl, and Edgar Wreford as the second delegate—a

difficult study in intelligent but mainly silent support—competently reinforced the small cast, although the girl's full mystic, and perhaps essentially Latin, flame eluded the actress (it would be interesting to see the play performed by Italian actors: only Percy gave a hint of the probable Italianate approach and style). Nevertheless, intellectually and dramatically the company played finely: only Yvonne Mitchell failed notably as the wife, playing a *distract* Ophelia where something of greater maturity and character was needed. The fault possibly was in Peter Hall's production, which lacked variety of pace although it gave scope to the symbol and drive of discussion.

The Queen and the Rebels

The second play of Ugo Betti burst on London on 26th October, 1955, in a West End commercial theatre, the Haymarket.

The play was *The Queen and the Rebels*, an earlier work than *The Burnt Flower-Bed*, his last and posthumous play. *The Burnt Flower-Bed* might be classed, like Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*, as a synthesis or summing up of a great dramatist's philosophy and view of life, with the mysticism of the humane writer moving towards death. It was a play packed with intellectual argument, a play of team-work with a fine but slightly diffuse dramatic technique. *The Queen and the Rebels*, on the other hand, takes the stage like an atomic explosion. It is far more melodramatic in theme; but the core of the same philosophy—the respect and dignity of the individual soul—flowers unscorched in a new setting.

Again we are on an indeterminate frontier hillside, and again we have the sense that neither story nor characters can be judged on a purely realistic plane. Revolution, mob hatred and coldly calculating party leadership tear the atmosphere.

A Queen, hunted for five years, is to be the scapegoat for social ills; but her place is taken by a prostitute who helps her to escape and rashly allows herself to be mistaken for her. And as the battle of wits goes on, the accused woman finds that that which began as contempt and anger for the hunters has expanded in her own soul into a new self-respect, a new dignity, an inconceivable sense that death with courage and nobility is a choice of which she is capable and a vindication of the human spirit.

This transformation of personality is, of course, symbolic as well as actual; but it is vividly and dramatically conveyed in a play which never releases its finely sprung tension (it is interesting to note that in both these plays Betti uses the technical device of bringing down his curtain on a point of suspense and commencing the next Act at exactly the same moment, so that the action is, in fact, continuous).

This developing character, Argia, provides a fabulous part for an actress of quality on a scale modern dramatists rarely achieve. Irene Worth, always one of our finest actresses, placed herself in the Peggy Ashcroft class with this study of degradation and nobility. We shared her wonder as the mangled blossom of good grew into a plant strong and unassailable. Her early haggard sensuality was as fine as her mystic power in meeting death, and this performance of passion and anger and spiritual transfiguration won a memorable ovation on the first night.

Leo McKern, moving on from a similar part in *The Burnt Flower-Bed*, backed her with ice-and-flame virulence as the Commissar who drives her to death, and there was a moving small performance by John Kidd, an excellent and strangely neglected character actor, as a porter whose hopes of the Queen steel the prostitute to produce the human fineness he is expecting, as a ballast to his own fears and cracking faith.

A dramatic scene between the true Queen, reduced to ignoble terror, and the prostitute has the underlying irony, or reversal of expected values, often suggested in Betti's work, and though too young for the part, Gwendoline Watford, an actress from the Midland Theatre Company, gave as the Queen a touching display of nerves frayed to snapping point. The play was incisively produced by Frank Hauser, who was responsible for the original Midlands production, but in some cases it could have been better acted.

The fact that the play, in spite of its roaring reception and the general admiration for Irene Worth's performance, achieved only a moderate run was a misfortune for standards in the West End commercial theatre. For this was almost the only new serious play produced in London during 1955, a singularly barren theatrical year, and it was important that Henry Sherek's courage in presenting it should be rewarded and other West End managements impelled out of their own rut of the frivolous and mediocre. It was not to be: but the impact of Betti on

our theatre is almost certain, in time, to bear creative fruit, and his influence to be felt among our young dramatists as that of Ibsen and Tchekhov continues to be felt. And it is worth remarking that neither Ibsen nor Tchekhov, even today and with star-studded casts, can expect more than limited runs by the most elastic commercial theatre standards.

The serious theatregoing public is never the largest; but its dwindling today where more intelligent modern plays is concerned cannot be viewed without alarm, and the decadence of taste will continue while West End managements anticipate it and give so little chance for an interest in better plays to develop. The insistence on comedy padding in plays on thoughtful themes is ruinous to the mature expansion of English playwrights and not to be found, in as restrictive a degree, in any other country. That is why the French theatre, as a whole, is more varied, creatively alive and of higher literary status than our own: it has wit, not as padding, but as an integral and civilised part of the theme. But it is possible to underrate public intelligence, even here, and the manager with the *flair* and interest to take an occasional risk, in spite of rising production costs, not only serves the cause of the theatre but may find a frustrated serious audience, larger than he expected and growing, rise to meet him. At the moment the risks are taken only in the case of established dramatists; it is the newcomer of writing purpose who needs encouragement, if the best potential dramatic talent is not to be vitiated in the steady drift towards the film and television studios.

Ondine

From the tough symbolism of Italy, once again, to the delicate symbolism of France. During the same month that *The Queen and the Rebels* was produced in London, the Bristol Old Vic gave the English première of Giraudoux's *Ondine*, with Moira Shearer in the part played by Audrey Hepburn in New York.

This is a fantasy which has its own satiric bite yet needs the most subtle enchantment in staging and *nuances* of acting. For the water nymph who loves a Knight whose conception of love is earthbound is not one of the balletic creatures the legend itself (once famous as a Romantic Period ballet) and the casting of Miss Shearer might suggest. Its satire of Court sycophantism and shallow sophistication springs

from a parallel realisation of the power of natural love and the tragedy of human inadequacy to meet it. Ondine in love becomes more warm and passionate, more selflessly devoted, more completely at one with the object of her affections than the born human beings who come in contact with her, and it was this side of the character that Moira Shearer, still learning as an actress, failed fully to explore.

But she has wit, pathos and intelligence, and established herself as an actress (more especially, perhaps, a comedienne) of skill as well as beauty. Depth and variety, one felt, might yet come. John Humphry as the Knight, Eric Porter as the King, Alan Dobie as King of the Ondines, and Edward Hardwicke and Viola Lyel as Ondine's supposed parents gave excellent support in a shimmering production by John Moody, at times a little too suggestive of enforced economy, and a little too fussily dressed by the ballet designer, Nicholas Georgiadis.

The rediscovery of Giraudoux as an important dramatist and the first production of plays by Betti are among the most rewarding and potentially far-reaching events in the English theatre during the past few years. They have given our theatre a creative lift and much-needed originality. It is for our own dramatists, now, to be given equal opportunity and equal encouragement to avoid the conventional rut.

VI
FROM PARIS TO DUBLIN

Waiting for Godot

WHILE Ugo Betti's *The Burnt Flower-Bed* attracted large and absorbed audiences at the Arts Theatre, the previous Arts Theatre play, *Waiting for Godot*, had been transferred by Donald Albery's management to the Criterion Theatre—a surprising experience indeed for the public straying in from Piccadilly Circus.

Waiting for Godot, written by James Joyce's former secretary Samuel Beckett, is what might be termed a tramp's vision of the universe played out in terms of the music-hall clowns' duo. In Paris, where the strange little play was an enormous success, this music-hall back-chat element is said to have been stressed far more in the performance. At the Arts Theatre the two tramps, verminous and diseased and waiting endlessly under a storm-shattered tree for a Godot (God?) who never comes, were humanised engagingly by the two players—Peter Woodthorpe and Paul Daneman. Daneman, the young Birmingham Repertory—Old Vic actor who had recently achieved a comedy triumph as Justice Shallow in *Henry IV, Part II*, at the Old Vic, was especially fine as Vladimir, an elderly tramp with seeds of distinction and a delicate touch of tenderness and patience in defeat. (At the Criterion Theatre his part was taken over by Hugh Burden, the versatile Daneman having rocketed into the short-lived *Punch Revue* at the Duke of York's Theatre, which pointed the moral of the unpredictability of English theatrogoers' taste—and its sometimes underrated intelligence—by allowing *Waiting for Godot* to outrun it in the West End by a period of several months.)

It is a sombre view of life and many in the contemporary world may think it a true one; stressing the physical corruption no less than the spiritual betrayal. Its symbolism is sometimes obscure and its theme needlessly reiterated in two closely similar and overlong Acts; but it has touches of poetry in the religious analogy and in the leaves which suddenly sprout from the deadened branches of the tree, and there is

one magnificent moment when a bestially slave-driven "underdog" bursts into an incoherent speech which gives an extraordinary Joycean impression of overcharged meaning. But the master-servant symbolism seems in these days outdated by trade union events, even though the master's own momentary despair comes like a lightning-flash of illumination. The "underdog", ironically named Lucky, was played remarkably by Timothy Bateson, also late of the Old Vic.

The play aroused exceptional controversy: drivel (as some say) or high art (the opinion of Harold Hobson and others), it holds a peculiar fascination with moments of sheer terror. Certainly there is more to it than appears on the surface; the two tramps, we are told, are the two sides of one complex human personality. But that the play is in fact very funny strikes me as a highly questionable matter of individual taste (it drew very little laughter at the performance I attended), and Hobson's view of its essential optimism and nobility must seem to many who have suffered in life rose-tinted. For though the play shows the strange indestructibility of human hope, it also shows that hope cheated and withered, in the wheel of time, by destiny. The leaf on the tree must fall again in the winds of Autumn, and the bright promise of religion continue an illusion of human despair.

South

Produced at the Arts Theatre during the London national newspaper strike in the Spring of 1955, a serious play on a disturbing pathological theme failed to get the critical consideration and publicity its quality merited.

Julien Green's *South* is the first play of this Franco-American novelist and had already had a run in Paris. Its title derives from the fact that it is set in the Southern States of America just prior to the outbreak of Civil War in April 1861; and there is some intelligent, though not very original, comment on slave possession and the combustible political atmosphere now brewing. These trappings are, however, deceptive; for although never plainly stated, the theme is homosexuality and the suffering and conflict of the various characters derive wholly from the atmosphere of abnormality which pervades the house.

The principal figure, a young Polish officer alien in all senses to his surroundings, is a chilling enigma until the nature of his tragedy

becomes apparent in the second Act. All in the household, including a young woman whose love for him is shot with repulsion, are attached to him or under his influence; but the appearance of another young man to whom he is deeply attracted, and tries unavailingly to express his real feelings, brings his personal problem to a head and precipitates his own fatal solution.

Dramatically, though with something of the novelist's literary amplitude in soliloquy, the play is finely and tensely conceived, and the characterisation of the Pole is piercingly observant; not withholding sympathy in a distressful psychological situation, yet admitting, too, the streak of perverted cruelty, especially towards the girl, inherent in such split and tormented characters.

Unfortunately the ambiguity with which the theme is presented (but which did not save the play from the Lord Chamberlain's ban on public performance) does not make its later stages easy to follow, and the period seems wrong for this particular problem—its being specially difficult to credit that a girl of twenty-two at that time would not merely have sensed, but fully recognised, the nature of the hero's malady.

Nevertheless this is a play admirably written, humane and searching, and entirely sensitive and delicate in its handling of a difficult theme. Far more deplorable moral suggestiveness is to be found in popular modern farces, revues and music-hall material, about the dissemination of which there seems to be no public conscience.

Denholm Elliott, though lacking the facial coldness and inscrutability one feels the part demanded, gave an imaginative and sensitive portrayal of the Pole and by far his best performance in the theatre up to that time. André Morell, always a reliable character actor, was strong and sympathetic as the head of the household, an older man deeply attached to the boy and aware of his tortured conflict; and Zena Walker gave a clever and amusing character sketch of an adolescent blossoming into womanhood. As the girl in love with the Pole, Clare Austin was highly praised, but though obviously a young actress of quality lacked, through immaturity, the full strength of character and suffering suggested in the writing.

Time Remembered

With 1954 approaching its end, the firm of Tennents attempted to crown a year of distinguished productions (*Marching Song*, *The Dark*

Is Light Enough, *The Burning Glass*, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Cherry Orchard* were among their list) with one of the lighter plays of the French dramatist, Jean Anouilh.

Léocadia, retitled in its English version *Time Remembered*, succeeded *The Cherry Orchard* and *Hedda Gabler* at the Lyric Theatre, Hammer-smith, and sustained the theatre's reputation at least for quality of *décor*. A new designer, Peter Rice, gave this Gallic fairy-tale a crystalline delicacy of colour, and in other ways—including the appearance of Paul Scofield and Margaret Rutherford in leading parts—the production recalled Anouilh's *Ring Round the Moon*, which achieved a furore in Christopher Fry's adaptation a few seasons before.

Unfortunately the new play did not recapture the earlier enchantment. It is a slim, potentially charming story of a young nobleman who mourns his dead love, and whose slightly mad but well-meaning aunt attempts to win him from grief by bringing to the house a young milliner, strikingly like the ballerina he loved. The milliner, one of Anouilh's celebrated *gamine* heroines, eventually wins him from melancholy and awakens a new love; although the story is not without a twist of irony when it becomes apparent that the young man is already forgetting the face of his former heroine, and accepting his aunt's revival of his memories from the boredom of the over-rich.

The play lacks the fun, pathos and variety of character of *Ring Round the Moon*: the witty lines are too spaced-out, a fussy over-balletic production occasionally irritated, and it neither enchanted nor touched our hearts as fully as one feels the author intended. It is, indeed, greatly inferior to *The Enchanted* by Anouilh's master in fantasy, Giraudoux, which the Arts Theatre revived the same year.

Scofield seemed rather wasted in a part which does not appear till the last few seconds of the first Act, although his distinctive elegance of style filled in the outlines later. Margaret Rutherford repeated her recognised frilly formula of aged eccentricity, and Geoffrey Dunn stood out in the amusing part of a saturnine waiter.

The young heroine was entrusted to an actress unknown to London, Mary Ure. Her cool blonde loveliness graced the scene, but her acting, though assured, tended to frigidity in a part where greater warmth of feeling might vitalise the play. Indeed, the girl's social poise equalled that of the young man himself, a mistake not made in Continental

productions where the *gamine* quality and social solecisms of the character were more amusingly stressed.

It is a feature of the London commercial theatre that although promising young actresses are often given leading parts, almost straight from dramatic school, on the strength of talent and promise rather than experience, the thoroughly accomplished young actress with several years of repertory work behind her can only with great difficulty get a footing in the West End. Mary Ure's daffodil-like beauty carried her to fame, perhaps a little too quickly and easily, as her Ophelia later suggested; but it is important for critical balance and acting values to remember that while she was given this opportunity splendid actresses like Rosalind Boxall and Nancie Jackson, after several years with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, still awaited parts worthy their talent in London, Rosemary Harris had to seek outstanding rôles in serious plays at the Bristol Old Vic, and the charming Jane Wenham, once Juliet and Desdemona at the same theatre and in London a singing success in *The Duenna*, was still in an uncertain position where drama, her true career, was concerned. Doreen Aris, a young actress of Mary Ure's age and noticeable quality, after a single television performance of great sensitivity, also returned to the Birmingham Repertory, where her Marina in *Pericles*, Blanaid in *The Moon in the Yellow River* and Sonia in *Uncle Vanya* won her high praise. She is an actress curiously like the pre-war player, Jill Furse, who died lamentably young, and whose fragile *fey* beauty, and emotional sensibility, were unique in their period.*

It is only too true that talent needs to be supported by luck in the theatre; but our London stage will be more vigorous and prepared for the future when it goes out and searches with greater perception for its acting material, and the occasional Mary Ure is joined by a more regular influx of experienced players, of proved gifts, from repertory.

The Waltz of the Toreadors

An Anouilh play of far greater substance than *Time Remembered*, and a touch of disturbing genius, *The Waltz of the Toreadors*, came to the

* It was only after her comparative failure as Ophelia that Mary Ure's true qualities as a modern actress of power, serenity and emotional range became apparent, when she left the commercial West End theatre to give outstanding performances in *The Crucible* and *Look Back In Anger* for the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre.

Arts Theatre on 24th February, 1956. One of the dramatist's self-styled *pièces noires*, it is a form of sequel to *Ardèle*, which suffered greatly from misinterpretation in its West End production, a fate *The Waltz of the Toreadors* fortunately did not share. For this virulent, lecherous, funny and distressing play was superbly produced by the Arts Theatre's sensitive and brilliant young director of productions, Peter Hall, with double settings by Paul Mayo rich in imaginative atmosphere, and if the cast was not perfect it at least was finely disciplined to the nature of the material and scene.

The General St. Pé of *Ardèle* is here an ageing *roué* writing his memoirs, lewd of tongue and desire, trying to forget an increasing paunch, yet beneath the peeling façade conscious of the bitter dissatisfactions of the hedonist and clinging sentimentally to an ungratified seventeen-year-old romance with a young woman he met at a ball. *The Waltz of the Toreadors* to which they then danced subtly insinuates itself into the atmosphere: an essence of nostalgia and our Springtime hopes which become delicately irradiated in the memory of Autumn. The impediment to the romance's fulfilment is the General's neurotic, foul-mouthed and bed-ridden wife, who has acted herself into an invalid in rebellion at his infidelities, but whose love for him, it becomes bitterly apparent, is merely the acquisitive possessiveness of the Gallic temperament. It is to this distorted harpy, scarifyingly pathetic, that the General, for motives of fear and conscience, has sacrificed his romance; and the romance itself evades him when the young woman, Mlle. de Ste-Euverte, suddenly realises her frustrated passion for the General through the unexpected medium of his despised and inexperienced twenty-year-old secretary.

Since the play is not tragi-comedy but that far more difficult form to produce and act, a tragi-farce, the secretary by a last-minute twist also turns out to be the General's illegitimate son. This seems rather dragged in, a sign of flagging invention, and not on the level of the uproarious absurdities of the wife's and young woman's unsuccessful attempts at suicide in the first Act; nor of the mellow yet acrid philosophies of the second Act, when a conversation between the General and the Doctor digs deep into the bitter satieties of hedonism, and leads directly into the dramatic and repulsive scene with the wife, played terrifyingly by Beatrix Lehmann with a poisonous tongue and

a head like a skull over which the skin is stretched livid and fleshless: a grinning mockery of marriage in decay.

The play ends on a note of sad and resigned despair. The General finds a passing consolation in the newest of a succession of chambermaids; there are no concessions to the soul consciously stirring in the second Act. But Hall produced the little scene beautifully, without vulgarity and on a note of almost poetic ruefulness, as twilight fell on the tortured house and the two incipient lovers moved into the garden.

Both Hugh Griffith and the maid, played by Juliet Duncombe as a simple, completely un-arch and gentle country wench, caught the atmosphere of this scene so carefully fostered by the producer, and Griffith, in the taxing and enormously long part of the General, proved himself once again an excellent character actor. Perhaps it was not his fault that he lacked the frayed but still potent personal magnetism, as well as the full flush of sensuality, which must surely be a keynote of the character. In fact it is a part for a great or near-great actor: Olivier or Eric Portman might give that extra spark and inner disquiet to it.

There was a neat sketch of a flighty French dressmaker by Mary Savidge; the General's two frumpish daughters, Anne Bishop and Hilda Braid, were shrilly amusing; and Walter Hudd, like Griffith not perfectly cast, nevertheless gave distinction of mind to the Doctor's philosophies of the second Act. Brenda Bruce, an actress with too individual a personality to seem completely transformed in such a character, did her best with the rather nebulous Mlle. de Ste-Euverte.

The play has that originality that seems the genius of the French theatre: it is impossible to imagine its conception in any other country, and its powerful impression in the theatre is as undeniable as its scurrility and humour. Perhaps it is the nearest to a great play that Anouilh, to my mind an inferior playwright to Giraudoux and to the Italian Betti, has yet written; for *Antigone*, a play of splendid fibre, owed much to the original Greek.

The Bishop's Bonfire

Owing to the dearth of new plays of any serious content in London during the 1954-55 Winter season, special attention centred on those produced outside the capital.

Sean O'Casey's last conflagration, *The Bishop's Bonfire*, attracted all the important London critics to Dublin on 28th February, 1955, and

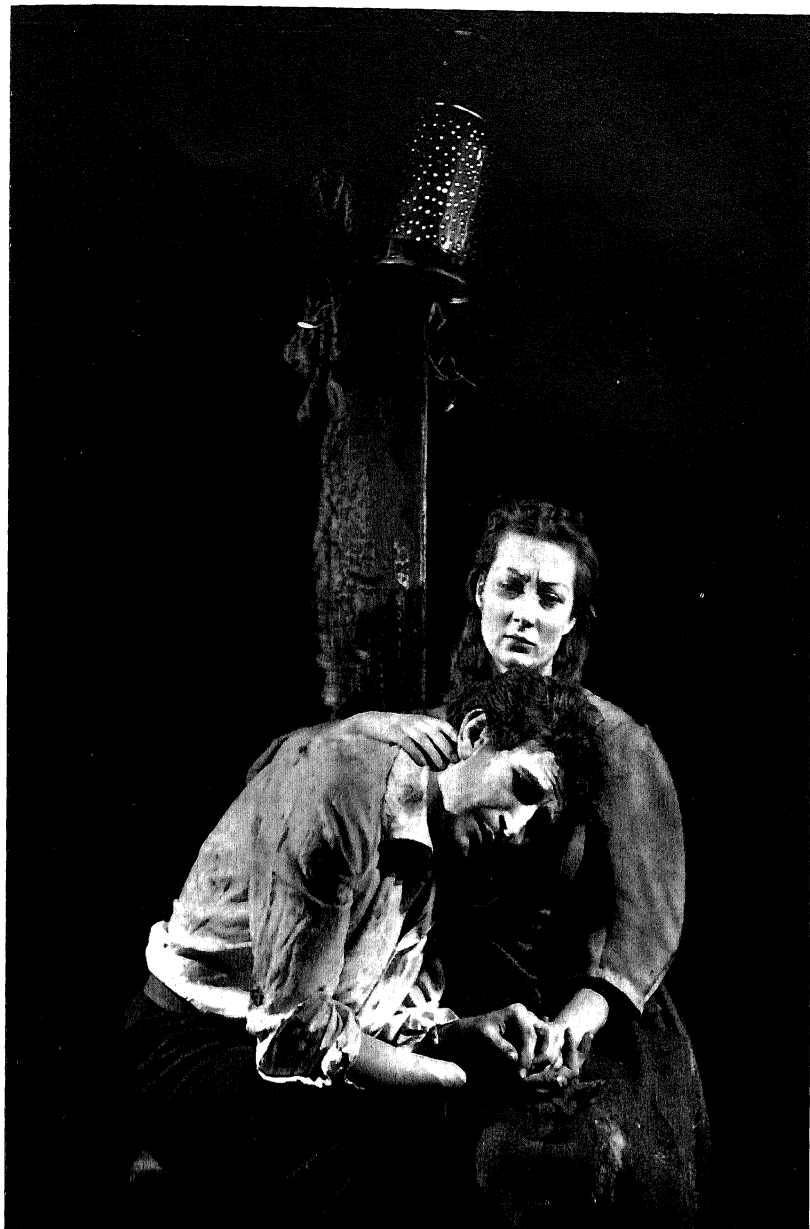
it seemed agreed, except among the Irish (unforgiving of a non-Catholic playwright who shook the Dublin dust off his feet), that O'Casey had written a play of sprawling iridescence and humane logic, which the fine Irish actor, Cyril Cusack, who played its most enchanting character part, Codger Sleehaun, quietly informed the booing gallery he was proud to present.

Its theme is individualism and youth's need to be freed of fetters, of that narrow orthodoxy that chills the suns of Spring with its wintry branches of chastity and superstition. Its cascades of humour include a wildly Irish prophecy of Red aggression on Eire (automatically first objective in an international war), which is received by the Codger with a flight of imaginative irony:

An', maybe takin' over the Turf Board, the Tourist Association, the Hospitals Sweep, the Catholic Young Men's Society, the Protestant pulpits, an' the President's residence, endin' maybe, with the plantin' of a Red Flag in the hand of Saint Patrick's Statue standin' helpless on a windy hill in the centre of the lonely Plains of Meath;

and equally wild suggestions for American salvation of this important territory by parachuted jeeps, which immediately jam the roads with the slaughtered bodies of Irish pedestrians and paralyse the country with a shortage of labour.

Fun and flowers of language irradiate a theme of profound seriousness, flawed by technical restlessness, with perhaps too reiterative a satire on the meanness behind the outward forms of religion and clerical flattery. The melodramatic ending, in which a young renegade from the Church, a social misfit embittered by the cajoling of his fiancée into becoming a Nun, shoots and kills her in a moment of passion, is insufficiently prepared for; the two characters concerned are very late in taking an important place in the action and are never fully developed. But wisdom blows through this play like an authentic wind of heaven, for all its superficial mockery of the Church through its sycophants (its "good" priest, Father Boheroe, is a balance to the action with his ineffectual but gentle tolerance and understanding); and O'Casey's prose, as lovely in its word imagery as Synge's and as poetic in spirit as the verse of lesser dramatists, blooms on the Codger's soft and lilting tongue like the geranium which is a symbol of the play's



Desmond Tripp

The Crucible (Arthur Miller), Bristol Old Vic, 1954. Final scene. Edgar Wreford and Rosemary Harris as John and Elizabeth Proctor.



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The Crucible (Arthur Miller), Bristol Old Vic, 1954. (Above) First scene. Michael Allinson (Rev. John Hale) with (L. to R.) Phyllida Law, Mary Savidge, Paul Lee, John Cairney, Ronald Hines. (Right) Trial Scene. Perlita Neilson as Mary Warren with (L. to R.) Michael Allinson (Hale), John Kidd (Danforth), John Cairney (Parris), Peter Wyld (Haythorne).

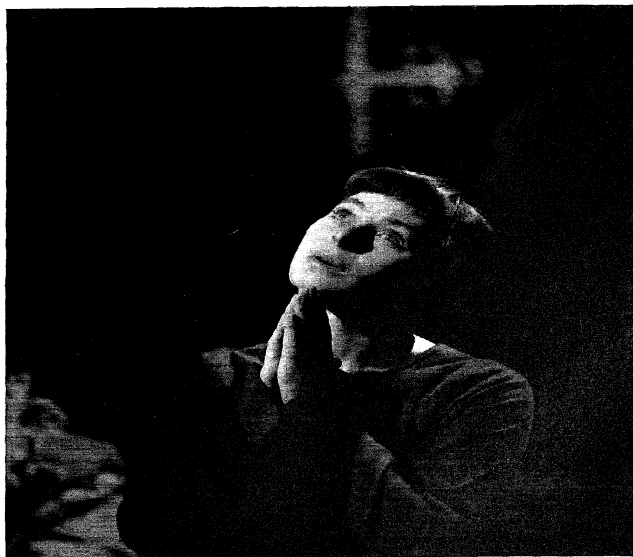


Houston Rogers

Blood Wedding (Lorca), Arts Theatre, 1954. Final scene. Rosalind Boxall as the Bride.



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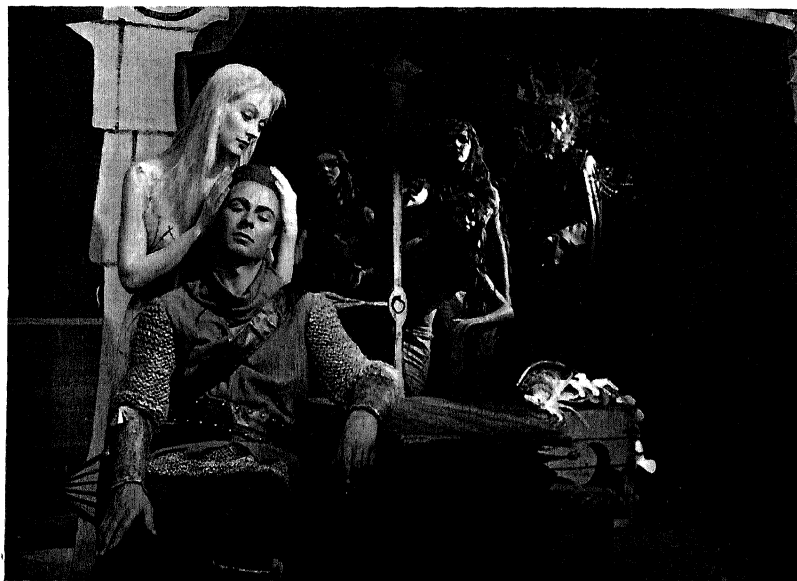
Houston Rogers

Saint Joan (Shaw), Arts, 1954, and St. Martin's, 1955. McKenna as Joan of Arc.



Armstrong Jones

Tiger at the Gates (Giraudoux), Apollo Theatre, 1955. Michael Redgrave as Hector and Barbara Jefford as Andromache.



Desmond Tripp

Ondine (Giraudoux), Bristol Old Vic, 1955. Moira Shearer as Ondine, John Humphry as Hans and (back right) Alan Dobie as King of the Ondines.

message—as the Codger himself, the commentator shrewd in age, is a symbol of O’Casey in the half-mellow, half-astringent, detachment of exile:

CODGER: Here’s the geranium for your urn. A handsome plant.
 Lovelier than the Count in all his glory, and lovelier
 than the Monsignor would be, either, were he dollied
 up in the scarlet robe of a cardinal. God’s work,
 gentlemen an’ lady.

FATHER BOHEROE: Helped by man, my friend; it’s a cultivated
 plant. God and man together.

CODGER: Helped be man, right enough. Man has to finish what
 God begins. Lovely blossoms: red as the wrath of God;
 red as the holy blood of Christ sprinklin’ mercy over
 all, unknown to some I know in Ballyoonagh.

To the Codger indeed go most of this play’s finest speeches, and his spirit is the spirit of the Irish country, seen through the eyes of a countryman and poet (Codger and O’Casey combined) to whom Nature, in the end, is a greater tribute to God than all the panoply of the priests, and Man with his accumulated knowledge someone who deserves all the bounty, all the joy, of life which God through Nature has put there for his experience.

A man’s more than a mayfly; tho’ the dance of the mayflies
 itself has a midget glory of its own. That’s what we have now—
 a midget glory. . . .

What are the things that God gives to one man to the things
 God gives to all? What’s the gold on a bishop’s mitre to the gold
 on the gorse? The sheen on his satin shoon to the feel of the petal
 on the wildest rose? What’s a bishop’s purple to the purple in the
 silky plume of the speary thistle?

This is the true glory: the glory of language descending straight through
 to our present age from Shakespeare. It is an appalling comment on
 our theatre that this play of a genius long silent still awaited, a year
 later, the initiative of a London manager to produce it. O’Casey is
 no parochial writer, but one whose failures or successes demand to be
 seen, and even more heard, throughout the world. Why deny to the
 Irish what we give, so freely, to the French?

VII

NOVELISTS AND DRAMATISTS

I Am a Camera : I Capture the Castle

THE play based on a novel, or written by a novelist, presents special problems in the theatre. Adaptations which preserve a narrator or narrative form are often most successful in capturing the spirit of the original, though there are very rare cases where a stage version of a novel is transformed into a work of art of a different nature, and seeming to spring naturally out of its dramatic medium. It is no less hard for the accepted novelist, especially in his first play, to write for the stage without some technical disadvantages undiscarded from the style of his usual writing structure.

A number of plays between 1953 and 1956 presented these problems, and showed various means of overcoming them. Two—*Waiting for Godot* and *South*—were dealt with in the previous chapter; but though both the authors here were novelists writing their first play, their French dramatic background (although neither is French-born) allowed a certain literary distinction and originality of theme or conception: neither very easily accepted in the more conservative, and far less thought-provoking, English theatre.

Early in 1954, John Van Druten and Dodie Smith both presented the West End with plays based on novels; freely in the first case but more closely in the second. Since both are themselves established dramatists the treatment did not lack awareness of the technical difficulties, although Van Druten, working on finer material, was the more successful in suggesting substance of theme and writing.

Two young actresses in their early twenties were the heroines of these plays. Both carried long and important parts, and carried them with something like triumph. Yet the plays and characters could hardly be more different, although there are certain similarities of technique.

John Van Druten's *I Am a Camera* is based on Christopher Isherwood's part-autobiographical stories of Berlin in that uneasy period around 1930 when the most notorious night life in Europe was

already faintly shaken by the rumbles of Nazidom and anti-Jewish propaganda. It is part of the dramatist's technique to use Isherwood himself on the stage as part-narrator, part-actor, physically within and yet spiritually outside events, recording them without moral judgment and with something of the detached visual clarity of a camera lens.

The actor of the part, Michael Gwynn—tense, stringy, over six feet tall—bears no physical resemblance to the short and chubby Isherwood, now a Hollywood script-writer, and was not intended to do so. His part is not a photographic one in this respect; but in a quiet and sympathetic way of his own he created a moving character out of this taciturn observer of events.

But the mainspring of *I Am a Camera* is the young English girl, Sally Bowles, a cabaret artist plunging with a curiously innocent delight into the dubious night life of the German city, indulging her every sensual desire, and putting on an elaborate pose of amoral sophistication which does not quite protect her from the brief passages of emotional suffering that such a life entails.

Van Druten and Isherwood have drawn her in microscopic detail. If what comes out is a slut with more heart and generosity than her actions warrant, this may be in part due to a streak of human wisdom in the writing (for this play is more searching, at moments, than its amoral detachment and witty emphasis at first suggest), but certainly more to the performance of Dorothy Tutin as Sally.

In her last play, Graham Greene's *The Living Room*, this miniature dark-eyed actress played a girl driven to suicide by the conflict of adultery and her Roman Catholic religion. That passionate but essentially single-minded love is not an attribute of Sally Bowles, a hedonist born; and Dorothy Tutin's occasional depth of pathos was perhaps exquisitely out of character. But this is an actress whose emotion has intensity, and in the witty extravagances she was delicious, reminding us of her adorable Katherine in *Henry V*, and pert little wife in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, at the Old Vic. No young actress of the last ten years has aroused more interest, or shown such emotional power and poignancy. Yet her piquant features fit themselves equally into comedy. With such a range and such natural charm, she must certainly not be confined to plays of dubious sexual emphasis.

The play was directed by the dramatist, and the landlady of Marianne Deeming, and the Jewish lovers of Renee Goddard and

Robert Cartland, helped to thrust the sense of impending doom into this world of butterfly morals.

Dodie Smith's *I Capture the Castle* is based on her own best-selling novel of the same title, and again the intrusive first person is noticeable. The narrator-actor in this case is an adolescent schoolgirl, Cassandra Mortmain, whose background of literary bohemianism may be deduced from her name. Her father is the author of a book which "carried on where James Joyce left off", and in ten years of subsequent brain-fatigue he has been unable to write (most writers will recognise this terrifying affliction, and wish Miss Smith had gone more helpfully into the psychological roots of the subject). In the meantime, he and his eccentric family scrape an existence in a mediæval castle for which they pay no rent.

But this is a fairy-tale, part Cinderella, part *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The youthful diary-writer eventually captures a rich American husband, and the father produces a new masterpiece of the "Enigmatist" School after being locked in a cell by his irresponsible children (it is a pity the dramatist does not see the potential satire in this, instead of treating the "masterpiece" in earnest).

As Dodie Smith's popular pre-war plays showed, she is an expert dramatist with an engaging humour. The play is never less than entertaining, and its heroine is enchanting. Virginia McKenna's flaxen, *spirituelle* beauty was a feature of Charles Morgan's *The River Line*; but here she showed an unexpected insight into half-child, half-woman psychology, with the slightly raucous, nervous voice, the jerky mixture of romanticism and commonsense, the capacity for sudden pain, that afflict the growing schoolgirl. It was the author's mistake to make this touching and amusing baggage seventeen years old; she has written, and until the final love scene Virginia McKenna acted, the part of a girl of fourteen.

Moby Dick

Fast upon the heels of Giraudoux's magnificent *Tiger at the Gates* in 1955 came a different story of destiny: Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in a dramatisation by Orson Welles.

Giraudoux's symbol of Fate is the tiger of war, which may devastate a nation and bring tragedy to whole populations. Melville's white

whale is no less a symbol, a misty shadow of evil whose fate is intertwined with that of the man whose obsession it is to pursue him.

This is no less an epic, but it is also a personal struggle, with death in the end claiming both enemies as hostage; and how much Moby Dick represents the conscience or evil in Captain Ahab himself is a matter left to the imagination of the reader.

It was left very much to the imagination in Welles' production, where the concentration was visual rather than mental and a vivid externalisation, as it were, of a spiritual theme. But putting the book within the framework of an American stock company's rehearsal solved many problems of dramatisation, enabling Welles to project his powerful theatrical vision into expressionistic form.

The bare wings, flats and flies of the undressed stage became a scene outside time and space, changing kaleidoscope-fashion from ship to harpoon boat, wharf-side to storm at sea, chapel to stage, with a wonderfully rhythmic plan of arc lights, swinging ropes and mimetic action. Out of this maelstrom Welles himself, as Ahab, stumped on his (imagined) wooden leg like some bulky Sailor Kane, freezing the blood with the man's maniac obsession yet giving expression, too, to the solid reality (one would say tragedy, but Welles sentimentalises to an extent) behind it. This was magnificently revealed—in a true flash of theatre—in the sudden realisation of the sane, unquelled Starbuck who opposes his will of the bond of respect and admiration that instinctively binds them.

Patrick McGoochan was highly praised as Starbuck, and Welles' company served him well, Kenneth Williams in particular producing a vivid character "double". But several critics, forgetful perhaps of Welles' long early apprenticeship in the theatres of Dublin and New York, underrated Welles' own performance as that of a "star" personality rather than seasoned actor. This showed (surely) misunderstanding of acting as opposed to quietism. Welles is an actor to his fingertips, with an eye like Jove to threaten or command, and a voice which can range from sonority and irony to pathos. He is capable of being moved, and can therefore move, and the star personality was disciplined always to the demands (admittedly dominating) of the character.

He created out of a great book something less great, intellectually unmemorable, yet a theatre piece of something like visual genius which

marvellously condensed the atmosphere of the period, seascape and heroic conflict. The four-week season at the Duke of York's Theatre caught on, and one hoped would encourage Welles to persevere with his plan to revive the play in repertoire with other plays in the autumn. A fresh, vigorous mind would not be unwelcome in our sagging West End theatre. It was not to be, at least at that time, and instead he chose, dogged by a Fate as malignant as Moby Dick, to act King Lear in disastrously adverse conditions in New York. When a tempest blows him our way again, we can be certain of something to lash us into alertness.

Crime and Punishment : The Bad Seed

Moby Dick is perhaps a more daunting prospect for the would-be dramatist than Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, which with its detective versus murderer theme has a structure less elusive to stage form than most of his gigantic works. The Arts Theatre, in 1954, staged a revival of Gaston Baty's adaptation of the novel which was originally produced here in the 'thirties. This attempt to pack an ocean of masterpiece into a pint pot was ingeniously produced in a kaleidoscope of short scenes by John Fernald; but it failed to reproduce the vitality of Dostoevsky's great novel and suffered from the bad miscasting of Raskolnikoff.

Dostoevsky's student, who murders on a theory of the Superman's right to transcend moral law, is a man of brain and intellectual pride, on a level with the Police Inspector, Porphyrius Petrovich, who patiently works to unmask him. The murderer's loss of nerve and progress to moral grace are inward developments: outwardly he should give the Inspector a good run for his money.

This Raskolnikoff was a neurotic craven from the start: both play and performance lacked the cohesion and the essence of pride of will which bound and gave nobility to the tragedy in the production of Rodney Ackland's version, with John Gielgud as Raskolnikoff, at the New Theatre some years before. But a quiet and moving performance of Sonia by Rosalind Boxall gave sustaining strength to the play.

Murder in the modern novel, although still often psychologically probed, is usually less searching and never part of a work of genius. *The Bad Seed*, based by the American dramatist Maxwell Anderson on

a novel by William March, is the tale of a child murderess, born without a sense of right or wrong and with an egotism fed with unscrupulous cunning beneath a golden-haired, blue-eyed innocence.

It would be idle to deny that certain murderers do appear to have a natural dæmonism into which moral considerations seem never to have entered, and the theme, though horrifying, is therefore valid. The fact that the streak is hereditary—having missed a generation—is more challengeable but dramatically legitimate. There is some rather shallow psychological discussion and not all the writing is on the level one has come to expect from Maxwell Anderson, author of the best of all the Mayerling plays, *The Masque of Kings*, and the fascinating *Winterset*; and the obviousness of his technique throughout is not entirely redeemed by a brilliantly ironic “surprise” ending.

But the play has some good scenes and an unremitting baleful fascination. It is excellent “theatre” and was compellingly acted at the Aldwych Theatre in 1955 by Diana Wynyard as the child’s painfully suspecting and agonised mother, Miriam Karlin as the heavily-drinking mother of a small boy murdered, and Carol Wolveridge (who was also in the dramatisation of Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Innocents*) as the malevolent yet childish logical criminal.

Image in the Sun

Howard Clewes’ *Image in the Sun* was a second play by a novelist of some distinction, presented by the Bristol Old Vic Company in February 1955. Its setting is Tipasa, an Algerian village built by the Arabs out of and among the Roman ruins; and its incidental humour (the supposed blowing up of an archæologist in some butter-fingered comedy with explosives) has an Irish tang, seemingly owing something to Denis Johnston’s brilliant tragi-comedy, *The Moon in the Yellow River*—a play, moreover, also about the inroads of Progress on a decaying, but reasonably contented, community.

Clewes’ theme is of a young girl’s passionate love for a disillusioned, middle-aged gun-runner, who brings the bright smoke of adventure into this hazy, overheated setting. He is momentarily deceived himself into a new urge for life; but the French captain who is his hound of justice catches up with him, and the looked-for death comes to him violently in the hazards of his trade. The meeting between the gun-

runner, Napier, and this Captain Mathieu is the best serious scene in the play. The Captain, civilised, ironic, strangely attracted to his quarry, is sensitively etched, and was beautifully played, with detached wryness, by Michael Allinson at Bristol. Atmospheric, too, are the colloquies of the archaeologist, Customs official and local hotelier, three old cronies whose interest in life is an Odets-like predilection for putting the world to rights in theory.

All this has a fine intelligence, and Mr. Clewes shades in the feeling of the ruinous and sweltering country with strong pencil-strokes. His *fey* young heroine and romance lack the same firmness and credibility, and Napier, a potentially interesting figure, needs a subtler, more expansive, delineation.

The production lacked pace (the indolence of the life needed to be heightened and varied); but Paul Lee as a cunning-eyed French peasant type (the hotelier), and Mary Savidge as his slatternly wife, gave admirable character studies, and Rosemary Harris was deeply touching in her final scene, though failing earlier to give the ardent spark that might (though the writing does not help) have ignited the doe-like charm of a heroine closer to stage than nature.

A sunlit setting by Patrick Robertson conveyed the picturesque beauty of white stone and pillared ruin: one of one's pleasantest memories of a distinctive yet still not fully moulded play.

The Mulberry Bush

On a more detached intellectual plane, although not a warmly human or entirely successful play, was *The Mulberry Bush*, a first play by the distinguished young novelist Angus Wilson, author of *Hemlock and After*. Wilson's play, set in a University, gives us a rather bleak but interesting picture of a professorial family, and the disillusionment of two elderly Liberals (founded, perhaps, on Sidney and Beatrice Webb) whose capacity for good social works is not matched by devoted understanding of or liking for individuals. Children (one dead and now producing skeletons out of an apparently impeccable cupboard) and grandchildren represent cleavages of view; and there is a thoroughly nasty "displaced youth" version of Shaw's Marchbanks whose ill manners and spite are incredibly tolerated as budding genius in the household.

Mentally this is a novelist's play, the characters revealed by the talk of others rather than through action or their own speech, and it has a kind of cold detachment which makes it difficult to tell where our sympathies should lie. Its people are clinically rather than humanly presented, and perhaps would have been better dealt with satirically rather than seriously. But when he can bring more warmth and compassion into his work, Wilson should prove a dramatist to be reckoned with. At the moment we have the uncomfortable feeling that he dislikes people; and indeed he has drawn a rather unlikeable lot.

The play was first produced at the Bristol Old Vic on 27th September, 1955, with Mary Hinton as Rose Padley, the elderly Liberal, dominating a company which, though talented, did not seem to be able to make a good deal of their parts. It is possible André Van Gyseghem, less sure in touch here than in his production of *The Confidential Clerk* the previous season, produced too much for surface comedy and most especially in the character of the dead scholar's mistress, Mrs. Loughton-Moore, the writing of which suggests considerably more depth of feeling than Viola Lyel brought to it. A revised version of the play was presented as the opening production of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre on 2nd April, 1956, with Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies in the part of Rose Padley, but the critical verdict remained much the same.

The Night of the Ball

The Night of the Ball, produced at the New Theatre on 12th January, 1955, is a first play by a novelist which evokes a period flavour, even though the setting is modern.

Michael Burns' play has the peculiar and luscious air of having been written by Pinero in one of his off-moments, and overhauled by Oscar Wilde to while away the *longueurs* of Reading Gaol. The characters are familiar to both dramatists; but neither Pinero's superb craftsmanship nor Wilde's wit are present to disguise their theatricality, and although the dramatist has a social conscience, and can write dialogue of intelligence, he showed here only a moderate conception of how to shape a play. Not even Gladys Cooper in full aristocratic swoop could electrify the evening. Tony Britton, a young actor from the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon, missed the deeper

character-notes which were certainly occasionally sounded in the part of the playboy hero, and Wendy Hiller had little to do except suffer in retrospect and show beauty and poise. Robert Harris, as the giver of the ball, which is intended to recapture pre-war lavishness and stir the nostalgia of a high society now decaying, gave a certain interest and distinction to a nebulous character, and Jill Bennett attracted attention as a young girl. But in the end the greatest effect of this play was decorative, the production achieving a glittering atmosphere of evanescent wealth with the aid of Loudon Sainthill's setting of the balcony above the ballroom.

These plays of Clewes, Wilson and Burns, and particularly those of the first two writers, suggest that England has still the material from which creative new dramatists may be drawn, although both *The Mulberry Bush* and *The Night of the Ball* show a curious tendency to revert to a past social outlook on misdemeanours involving mistresses and illegitimate babies—an outlook it is difficult to imagine their writers reproducing in the more sophisticated world of the novel, a truer mirror of contemporary life. The plays had faults, but dramatists can only learn from seeing their works in performance on the stage, and it is significant that only the least good of these three plays was able to obtain commercial West End production. Until wider production of serious plays is obtainable (there are no comparable difficulties for the new author of farce or light comedy), we must face a hiatus in the development of the potentially valuable dramatist and his winning from the world of letters.

VIII

CONSCIENCE AND JUSTICE

The Devil's General

AN interesting new play, produced at the Savoy Theatre on 23rd September, 1953, was Carl Zuckmayer's *The Devil's General*, the first of the post-war German plays on the Nazi régime to reach England.

Its upsetting problem is one of ethics, although this does not fully emerge until the end of the play, when we, like the Luftwaffe chief of the title, are invited to accept as justifiable a sabotage which, by means of faulty aircraft parts, has caused the death of Nazi pilots. One at least of these has appeared to us as a likeable young man with a devoted wife, and he was the acknowledged friend of the air chief and the saboteur. In the space of minutes the air chief, General Harras, is converted by the arguments of his calm and fanatical Chief Engineer, now proved to be leader of the saboteurs, and, knowing himself already marked down by the Gestapo for his dubious sympathy with Hitler, goes off to his own death in a defective plane, with a final blessing to the traitors who had killed his friend.

We in the audience, perhaps, are less convinced: "the end that justifies the means" was one of the fallacies exploded by Nazidom itself, as it has been exploded brutally throughout history, and it is possible to see the Germans as a collection of human beings, capable of kindness and suffering in war like ourselves, apart from the vicious control of the Nazi bosses. It is a merit of this play that until near the end it does keep this human balance, though the plot is melodramatic and the characters tend to sprawl, robbing the play of shape.

Its first scene in a wartime Berlin restaurant is admirable and tense: a cross-section of upper-class Germany under Nazidom, dominated by the figure of Harras, a heavy-drinking, womanising pilot from World War I, confident (over-confident) of his own indispensability to the Nazi régime, and recklessly ironic in his comments on it and its masters. It is an Act admirably dramatic in that it leaves us wondering

about the characters and turn of events. But the play keeps us wondering too long, the revelation of the saboteur's identity coming too late (and apparently purely to create a "detective fiction" mystery) for the theme to be discussed with its many agonies and implications.

The General himself becomes unconvincingly "toned down" by a magazine romance, and the bitter visit and outburst of his young friend's widow in the last scene is psychologically unbelievable. Every incident in the plot leads one to expect her to accuse the General (who is suspected himself of the sabotage) of murdering her husband; instead, unaccountably converted to anti-Nazidom, she takes the line of purely ethical castigation.

This just does not fit, although owing to a beautifully taut and sincere performance by Rosalind Boxall, all the more telling for its quiet sense of pent-up emotion, the little scene made a dramatic effect on the stage. General Harras, although based on a genuine Luftwaffe chief, General Ernst Udet, has a similar psychological cleavage, but Trevor Howard, one of the few actors who seem to have matured with filming, played him with a robust naturalness that held the attention, without perhaps quite achieving the sense of disintegrating greatness required. There were some weak female performances, but Wilfrid Lawson (who a few years before would have made a striking Harras) as Harras' faithful bucolic driver, and Richard Warner as an icy Goebbels type, gave notable characterisations.

At least this play had drive and some intelligent talk, and an excellent production by John Fernald and settings by Fanny Taylor helped it to take the stage with *éclat*.

The Strong Are Lonely

The desert of London's frivolous theatre of 1955 was irrigated in December by a small oasis of serious drama; written, like *The Devil's General*, by a German dramatist, it is true, and presented for a limited run of four weeks at the Piccadilly Theatre, but nevertheless an oasis, and one of more than mirage-like clarity and force.

The play, *The Strong Are Lonely*, translated by Eva Le Gallienne from the original of Fritz Hochwalder, is a humane drama of the disbanding of a Utopian Jesuit community, by political and orthodox religious pressure, in a golden summer of eighteenth-century Buenos Aires. It was presented adventurously by Donald Wolfitt, whose activities have

been largely confined to Shakespeare, but who here found noble and conscience-torn acting material in the character of the Jesuit Father Provincial.

This sociological-minded priest, who conducts his Utopia of Indians with a benevolent despotism, is arraigned by a deputy of the Spanish King, Don Pedro de Miura, who reluctantly brings him to trial as a result of the vindictiveness of slave-driving planters, and as an emissary of a great Empire which feels its warlike authority being undermined. He is a man of conscience himself, yet while pitying the priest feels and submits himself to the force of political necessity; and the actor of the part, Robert Harris, very finely showed the gnawing difficulties of the emissary's position.

In the conflict of wills and outlook that ensues the Father, Alfonso Fernandez, confronts the threat to his ideals and authority with a recourse to militant force: the Jesuit is an armed community, and his fellow priests rally strongly to the cause. But throughout the trial of the first half of the play a Spanish traveller, in sombre dress, has watched the proceedings with a subtle and secretive detachment; he now reveals himself to the Father Provincial as a high official of the Jesuit order, sent incognito to command the Buenos Aires Jesuits to bow to political expediency, and disband a community which places too great an emphasis on the physical, rather than the spiritual, well-being of its members.

The Jesuitical vow of obedience is absolute; each member must be "as wax" to the orders of his superior officer. The Father Provincial pleads in vain, and under oath of secrecy, and the rack of conscience, compels his horrified followers to lay down their arms and agree to dissolution. One of them, a fiery brand of the order, disobeys; and in the consequent outburst of shooting the Father Provincial himself is mortally wounded, and accepts his death with a resigned recognition of the fact that his Indian converts have become Christians from material, not religious, motives, and the Church of Christ must emulate, at whatever cost of physical suffering, the poverty and purely spiritual teaching of its founder. Heaven, not earth, is the goal of the true Christian.

It is very difficult to tell quite how much irony the author intended in this ending; showing Don Pedro sorrowfully signing death warrants while some hundred thousand Indians are betrayed back into slavery

and exploitation. Perhaps the translation has obscured his more definite ethical judgment. But although sympathising with the Father Provincial's sincerity and anguish in moral conflict and disillusion, and his serene vision in death, irony will inevitably occur to many modern minds, and his acquiescence does involve a dramatic decline in the second Act.

Nevertheless, this is a fine, straightforward play which holds the interest, and it is impossible not to admire the integrity of the writing, with no concessions to vulgarity or melodrama. It was well produced, without unnecessary fuss, by Margaret Webster, a good actress who left this country twenty years ago to become a successful Shakespearean producer in America; and Rolf Gerard's starkly simple but sunlit set, in beige stone with a *motif* of austere black furnishings and costumes, was a continual pleasure to the eye.

Wolfit himself, a powerful Shakespearean, gave a performance of deliberate restraint, quiet in its authority, mystic in death, and vivisectioned by an anguish that was the product of sincerity, not of rant. Like his Svengali on the screen, it will stand high in his non-classical achievements.

Ernest Milton's livid Jesuit emissary was much praised, but to my mind this distinguished actor's serpentine and fibreless mannerisms intruded too greatly into the portrait. Derek Oldham, once a Gilbert and Sullivan *matinée* idol, proved he has ripened into a genial middle age and good actor as a friendly Dutch trader, and David Oxley stood out darkly as the Jesuit rebel. Altogether, a long all-male cast made us feel no lack of feminine variety. The play was later transferred to the Haymarket Theatre, and Wolfit's faith in it can only be admired and endorsed.

The Shadow of Doubt

John Clements is one of the increasingly rare examples, like Wolfit, of the actor-manager still working in our theatre. His record is a fine one, including Shaw, Restoration comedy and some new plays of good quality. But for some years he himself did not play a serious and highly dramatic rôle in the theatre, and his new managerial venture at the Saville Theatre in the Autumn of 1955 was all the more welcome.

The Shadow of Doubt, by a new playwright, Norman King, was in itself the only serious English play of quality to be produced in the

West End this season. Its affinity is *The Burning Glass* by Charles Morgan, another play which moulded its theme around the conscience problems of a scientist of nuclear physics. To my mind, in spite of Morgan's high literary position and distinction of mind, King's is the more believable play.

It is, for one thing, built primarily on character rather than plot; but it is all to its credit that the plot—less melodramatic than Morgan's, less obvious in its dénouement—is there. This is an exciting play but also a psychologically absorbing one; and it is part of its admirable construction that the plot-mystery and psychology are completely interdependent, and remain credibly so to the end.

Its setting is the drab "furnished rooms" of a typical industrial town of the North, and it soon transpires that the husband and wife who inhabit it have been through, and are now trying, under a new name, to live down, all the shameful publicity of the husband's trial for treason and subsequent imprisonment. There is a mystery, still, about the man's own actions. A physicist of international repute, exclusively absorbed in his work, he has poured out the secrets of his research to a former pupil who proved to be a Communist agent. There is no known link of the scientist, Arthur Ross, with any political organisation, and no proof that he knew of his confidant's beliefs. Nevertheless, the facts themselves were clear, and sufficient to condemn him.

Now a newspaper leakage tears aside his disguise, loses him his job and brings back into his life the M.I.5 man, Manning, whose steady probing had brought about his former arrest.

The man himself, a mass of high-powered nerves and frustration, is tormented by one passion: the passion to return to his life's work as a physicist. For him there are no other release and no other resources. His sleepless nights are haunted by the ideas that can be brought to practical fruition only through the laboratory facilities he lacks. When a highly suspect offer of such work comes his way, he is too far obsessed to wish to query it, and the fight of his wife and one other friend cannot hold him back from the disastrous brink of possible treason. The development of this situation and the final unravelment of the man's character are dramatically done: the tension is admirably sustained and the solution does not strain belief.

Ross' character is the play's hinge and this is the creation of a natural dramatist with an understanding of life. It has not only the absorption

and frustrated vision of the genius, but a subtly studied awareness of the minor irritabilities and mental twists of the man with a chip on his shoulder: the man who has grown and withdrawn into a shell, unself-confident, fierce in his repudiation of sympathy or intimacy. In a revealing line that he and his wife must be regarded as "ships that pass in the night"—a brusque rejection of an offer of friendship—the author shows a sure touch in the drawing of a psychological problem.

The part gave magnificent opportunities to John Clements which were magnificently seized, reminding us of the dramatic power of this actor which for too many years has been hidden by the mask of comedy. It was a performance of imagination and intense nervous force, full of those sudden gestures—such as hands power-driven on to the knees—which reveal the razor edge of control on which the man moves. It dragged one into the play and into the man's tortured mind, neither likeable nor unlikeable (Clements did not sentimentalise) yet always fascinating and sometimes moving. The play is not a tragedy; but this was acting within the tragic wheel.

Raymond Huntley, Patrick Barr and others gave excellent support; but the production at times was slow and unimaginative in its moves. Clements' was the dynamo that drove the action.

Murder Story

Ludovic Kennedy's was in 1954 a new name in the theatre, although a book on Nelson's Captains, some general journalism, and the editing (in succession to John Lehmann) of a B.B.C. literary programme had already won him some recognition of his own talents, apart from the inevitable publicity attendant on being the husband of the ballerina, Moira Shearer.

His first play, *Murder Story*, produced at the Cambridge Theatre on 22nd July following a successful "try-out" at Aldershot, reduced still further the gap in fame between the young couple in their respective careers. The topical nature of its subject ensured the play publicity and discussion; and its expert playing on the nerve of sentiment might have obtained it a run in spite of its unrelieved poignancy and lack of humour, had not outside factors mitigated against this.

The execution of a nineteen-year-old almost illiterate boy, Bentley, for the murder of a London policeman during a robbery (although the

actual shot was fired by his confederate, a boy of sixteen named Craig), had caused considerable comment in England, and Kennedy takes a similar theme for his otherwise wholly fictitious story. The circumstances, however, are not quite the same, for the boy drawn by Kennedy, Jim Tanner, is so obviously a good-natured if unstable half-wit, with the retarded mentality of a child of nine, that it is inconceivable English law would condemn him to death or, having condemned him, refuse a reprieve.

This seriously weakens Kennedy's obviously sincere and passionate plea against capital punishment; especially as he does not allow the other side of the question (for instance the feeling of the police) to be discussed, nor the case of Tanner's younger but purely vicious associate and leader, Ted Clift, to enter the picture. It is wholly on the unfortunate Tanner, and his blind but kind and well-meaning family, that the play concentrates, and this at first even hampers the audience's ability to be moved. The thesis is too patently based on "special pleading", and on the determination to wring the heart at the cost of rational reasoning.

But if this play lacks, when analysed, either full plausibility or mental power and conflict, it does show a natural feeling for character and the stage, and a rare ability to concentrate emotion and canalise feeling on a particular issue.

Nearly all the scenes, after the first Act, take place in the condemned prisoner's cell, and here Kennedy makes expert use not only of his journalistic ability to present facts, but of a sensitive feeling for the growth of literacy in a retarded adult. His prison warders are humane officials, quickly sympathetic to their child-like charge, and on the efforts of one of them to teach the boy to read much of the rest of the play hinges.

It is not, of course, wholly credible that a hitherto illiterate, from a good home, could progress so far in a matter of three weeks; and the reading matter that then delights him (*Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wind in the Willows*) only goes to emphasise again the childish quality of brain, and the unlikelihood of the legal condemnation. Had Kennedy given Tanner even a hint of real malice in his tempers, his characterisation and play would have been the stronger and his case against capital punishment less obviously easy. But the gradual awakening of this mind to the joys of living and literature, on the very threshold of the

grave, is moving and most delicately handled, and in spite of some superstructures of sentimentality (the padre's rôle, bringing the consolations of religion to the young doomed life, is an extremely difficult one) it carries the audience to a genuine sense of tragedy.

It will be easier to judge Ludovic Kennedy's importance as a dramatist when he uses mental as well as emotional stimulation and plays fairer in the matter of his chosen theme. In the meantime he shows great promise, and the makings of a born writer for the theatre.

He was greatly helped by his cast, which the West End management, eschewing "star" names, boldly retained intact from the original Aldershot production. Donald Bradley played the illiterate Tanner, with his sudden bursts of enchanted enthusiasm, of necessity on rather one note, but with that note exquisitely and sensitively produced. His facial expression was always varied, and his performance excellent within its range. An equally moving character study was given by Margaret St. Barbe West as the boy's grieved mother; and the easy-going father of Leslie Handford, the vicious spiv-like Cliff of Frank Pendlebury, and the two warders of Kenneth Outwin and Campbell Copelin were also outstanding. One of the advantages of the production and acting was that it was wholly naturalistic and human, thus supporting the human validity of the dramatist's best writing and characterisation.

Blind Man's Buff: Carrington, V.C.

Plays with a trial scene in a Court of law are always considered to have in them the elements of dramatic success, and perhaps with this in mind Frances Day, on entering the ranks of management, selected a serious play, *Blind Man's Buff*, as the first offering of her newly-formed company. It was produced at the St. Martin's Theatre on 14th October, 1953, and proved to be an adaptation by the Irish dramatist, Denis Johnston, of the earlier play, *The Blind Goddess*, by the German author Ernst Toller.

The theme is a miscarriage of justice in a trial for murder. An Irish doctor is accused of poisoning his wife, following an *affaire* with a woman doctor, and although we know the case to be one of suicide the man, owing partly to some malicious evidence, partly to his own damaging outburst of vindictive temper in the dock, is found guilty.

He is not the kind of man to evoke much sympathy, which makes

the first scenes seem irritating and insignificant. But no trial scene can fail to hold the interest, and as the play progresses it becomes less an unconvincing human document, and more a tense and balanced study of the workings of Justice. In the end the State acknowledges its mistake, through the person of the State Solicitor, who proves to have the integrity and, unexpectedly, the humanity to press on for the truth, at the expense of his own reputation. Ironically, at the end, he receives small thanks from the victim, and the woman doctor, loyal in her support throughout, realises herself that the released man can no longer hold her love or regard.

Dennis Price could make little of the unlikeable doctor, although Elizabeth Allan, with slightly better material, was sincere as the woman. The real success of the play was in its knowledgeable, and sometimes humorous, study of the legal profession from within, and the acting of these parts was a triumphant vindication of the fact—too often disbelieved by West End managements—that actors experienced in classical plays can also play modern parts finely.

John Phillips as the State Solicitor, Douglas Wilmer as the defending counsel, and Newton Blick as the Judge were all members of the previous season's Old Vic Company; and all played with a quiet dignity, naturalness, force or humour that "carried" the play. Their audibility, even without raising the voice, was a lesson to most West End actors.

Dorothy and Campbell Christie, authors of *Carrington, V.C.*, are a husband-and-wife playwriting team who have several successes to their credit; most notably *His Excellency*, a human, balanced and understanding study of the problems of a Labour Party official who has to take over a colonial governorship traditionally Conservative in background: a part played in the West End, in brilliant succession, by Eric Portman and Donald Wolfit. In July 1953, at the Westminster Theatre, they turned their attention to the Army Court Martial, of which Campbell Christie has first-hand knowledge as a retired Major-General.

The background of this play is therefore in the nature of a skilled "documentary". The V.C. hero is on trial for abstracting a sum, already owed to him by a dilatory Treasury, from the regiment's safe. It was a quite open theft, intended as a protest against the difficulties of sustaining a higher middle-class standard of living on current Army

pay. The issue, however, is complicated by envy within the service and the demands of a neurotic wife, not to count a W.R.A.C. adorer of the hard-pressed V.C.

There is material for a good "well-made" play here and the authors have used it cunningly, with humour as well as drama. The piece holds the attention as all good trial plays must; but the plight of the hero seems a little overstrained and is not helped by rather shallow novelettish psychology. The V.C. is too consistently "white", his commanding officer too consistently "black", for the piece to stir our human interests as deeply as it should, and the whole problem lacks the balanced human treatment of the Christies' earlier play.

It was the acting of the charming and quietly persuasive Alec Clunes, as the V.C. conducting his own defence, which most truly aroused our sympathy. Clunes, the progressive director of the Arts Theatre for many years, and a classical actor of distinction, here made one of his rare but welcome appearances in a modern play. Rachel Gurney, as the neurotic wife, also played with force in an adequate cast.

But the play is on a lower level altogether than *The Devil's General* or *The Strong Are Lonely*, and its problem of conscience and justice in comparison seems manufactured. The line between the truly serious dramatic work and the commercial play is often very sharp and definable.

The Power and the Glory : The Family Reunion

Two plays in 1956 came finely into the category of serious dramatic works, and both were produced in succession in the Peter Brook-Paul Scofield season of plays at the Phoenix Theatre. This season, successfully begun with *Hamlet* late in 1955, continued with *The Power and the Glory* and completed its trinity with a revival of T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, which was originally staged at the Westminster Theatre before the War with Michael Redgrave in the part of Harry, Lord Monchensey.

The Power and the Glory, by Denis Cannan and Pierre Bost, was produced on 5th April, 1956, and is based on a novel by Graham Greene: the story of a "bad" or "whisky" priest who in the turbulent 1930's is hounded by the revolutionary police in a Mexican state, protected by the populace and peasantry and driven by conscience to continue in secret the offices of his calling.

Opportunities come for him to escape the country; and humble, fearful, corrupted and degraded as he is, he clutches at them like the straws of an imaginary paradise. But always when the call comes—usually that to attend a dying man, with the possible concealment of a trap—he must answer; a bad priest is better than no priest in an atheistic state, and the mysterious impetus of his calling and his conscience outweigh, without destroying, the degradation and the fear.

He is a man both hunted and possessed; and at a superb moment in a crowded prison cries out, like Judas by his gallows tree, for betrayal. But no one will give him that peace: religious superstition and human integrity hold fast. So the wandering from village to town goes on; the search for wine at black market prices for his Masses becomes a delirious farce which is yet fraught with pathos; and the Lieutenant of Police who pursues him without recognising him shows ironically plain as a kinder, better and idealistic man, blind to the corruption of the new socialist heaven he would build on earth.

No hunt can go on for ever: the priest walks into the final trap and is shot. But no human idea for which men give their lives can be stamped out either: as the "last priest" dies another rises to take his place.

This moving and dramatic revelation brings the wheel full circle and the play to an inspiring close: reaching out beyond the Catholic religion which is the novelist's main concern to the indestructibility of all human endeavour and passionately-held beliefs. It was the apex of a vivid production by Peter Brook, which knitted the sprawling narrative together and with the help of Wakhevitch's sun- or neon-lighted settings powerfully projected an atmosphere of Mexican life, police-state corruption, and the driftwood of down-trodden humanity.

It is many years since I read Greene's novel and it is probably true that the full complexities of the priest's psychology, and the clash of ideas with the Lieutenant in the last scene, are compressed and partly nullified on the stage. It is a condition of the skeleton structure of the drama that this should be so; the novelist creates his flesh over many pages, while the dramatist must cover the bare bones by an illusion, flashing from an inspired sleight-of-hand such as another person's reaction or a subtly telling line.

Within the limits Greene's priest emerged on the stage with subdued

force, owing partly to the performance of Paul Scofield, who used the character-lines of his interesting face with careful inspiration to build up a character haggard and round-shouldered, prematurely aged, whisky-sodden and pitiful, yet strangely compelling in this very draining of all personality and concentration on the man's one selfless absorption. It was acting of the utmost integrity which brought its own reward: in the end the figure haunted us and, craven yet acknowledging his fear, went to death with a piercing simplicity.

A long cast gives few other noticeable acting opportunities and some of these were missed; but Harry H. Corbett's Lieutenant was sympathetic and psychologically understanding, and Robert Marsden gave a shiningly oily impression of a whining Mexican betrayer—geographically the most successful of the performances. But owing to Brook's production the atmosphere as a whole seeped across the footlights: we were deep in the place and the period, and the play absorbed, moved and repelled.

All three plays produced at the Phoenix Theatre—*Hamlet*, *The Power and the Glory* and *The Family Reunion*—have been fundamentally studies of conscience: the conscience of the introvert, the man of reason and sensibility, called upon to take the violent action of revenge; the conscience of the "bad priest" who is yet unable to desert the demands of his religion in adversity; the conscience, unexplained, of the man with a natural call for expiation, either of his own sins or those of his fathers.

Shakespeare's Prince and Greene's whisky-sodden, uncourageous priest are thrust by circumstance into their spiritual dilemma; only after the problem has confronted them does their psychological and intellectual instinct dictate or stumblingly unravel the way to meet it. But in Eliot's hero, as in his later heroine Celia Coplestone in *The Cocktail Party*, redemption is inborn, something outside personal volition or the conscious need for atonement, a call to service and possible martyrdom for which the guilt complex is entirely undefined.

The Family Reunion resolves itself finely in the end around this instinct, and it is clearly formulated towards the close of the play by Harry's lifelong servant and chauffeur Downing:

"I've always said, whatever happened to his Lordship
Was just a kind of preparation for something else.

CONSCIENCE AND JUSTICE

I've no gift of language, but I'm sure of what I mean:
We most of us live according to circumstance,
But with people like him, there's something inside them
That accounts for what happens to them ”.

Harry's sense of guilt may be personal, the slaying of or will to slay his wife, or ancestral, through the dead father who contemplated a similar crime; but it is an essential to the understanding of Eliot's play that the call that finally comes to Harry to follow his Eumenides—"I must follow my bright angels!"—is a religious call from deep within the character of a mystic, and a natural resolving of the spiritual unrest and torment which have sprung, in his own character, from a sense of this unfulfilment.

This is the modern twist given by Eliot to the ancient legend of the Erinyes and Eumenides, the avenging Furies who turn to the "Kindly Ones" (Harry's "bright angels") when he at last realises the way to expiation, and his own nature. His guilt may be no more than this: an unconscious denial of his own spiritual roots. For this he is pursued, through two Acts, by the Furies of conscience, and with self-realisation the Furies cease to menace, and become a benediction.

In *The Family Reunion* Eliot had not yet developed his technical theory of dramatic plainness of language—a theory formulated, it is interesting to note, by Shelley when he turned from lyric poetry to the stage—although many passages show the way he was moving. The verse and words still flame and flicker, unstable but often musically exciting; the poetry still has decorative flesh as well as bone and structure. And throughout the play, insufficiently yet interestingly characterised, there is a sense of mystery remarkably sustained: the mystery of life and living, soul and spirit, beating against our uncomprehending minds.

“ But the circle of our understanding
Is a very restricted area. . . .
What is happening outside of the circle?
And what is the meaning of happening?
What ambush lies beyond the heather
And behind the Standing Stones? ”

The un-Greek chorus of uncles and aunts is a ticklish problem for the producer, but there is meaning in their very nonentity—they are the average mind beating against the bars erected by its own averageness:

that division between the real and unreal world, of which only the Harrys of our earth catch more than a frightening glimpse. With subtle lighting Peter Brook came near to solving the dramatic problem: the play's setting, too, and vision of vague winged Furies behind the great windows, was his own, and accentuated the atmosphere.

He and Eliot both were magnificently served by the cast. Scofield's Harry was an imaginative study of nerves "tuned in" to an outer world, and a mind in torment until restlessness was stilled in the serenity of self-knowledge. Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Agatha, his key to revelation, gave an unforgettable performance of tranquil resignation and mystic insight—one of those performances that make one hold one's breath, in case the fragile cask of spiritual illumination may shatter like the lamp of Shelley's poem. Sybil Thorndike towered in character and grief as the indomitable Dowager Lady Monchensey (there was a superbly-played scene between the two women). And below this level Harry H. Corbett, Lewis Casson, David Horne and Nora Nicholson moved with shrewd and mundane assurance.

IX

SHAKESPEARE

The New Old Vic : "Hamlet" and "All's Well That Ends Well"

THE Old Vic opened on 14th September, 1953, a new régime under the direction of Michael Benthall, a young producer whose work had attracted some notice during the previous few years. A five-year-plan was conceived, during which it was intended to produce all thirty-six Shakespeare plays in the First Folio—a feat previously achieved at the Old Vic, under Lilian Baylis, thirty years before.

The theatre also reverted to the "repertory" policy which was instituted by Sir Ralph Richardson and Sir Laurence Olivier during the war at the New Theatre; meaning the plays are kept in the repertoire for the season and performed on different nights. Thus this season opened with *Hamlet* and the following night *All's Well That Ends Well* was added to the repertoire.

The first thing that became obvious from these two opening productions was that this was to be a "producer's" era, with both the good and the evil that entails. The players "on top", if one excepts the experienced Fay Compton with her voice of untarnished silver, were certainly not chosen for classical and poetic quality, and poetry, sometimes by "cuts", sometimes by sheer bad speaking, has been the major thing sacrificed at the Old Vic both in this and later seasons.

Hamlet was played full out for melodrama, and its visual impact was considerable. We had here many of the touches which have illumined modern productions of the play since Gielgud and Guthrie: Hamlet's seizing of the King's sword in "Now might I do it pat", for instance, leaving a terrified Claudius to discover its loss, and his near danger, on rising from his prayer; and the hedging in of Hamlet by the King's followers, like a wall of steel in the darkness, before the Prince is packed off to England. It was a new, and a little overstrained, touch for Hamlet to keep his back to the Ghost for the whole of his first speech. It derived, possibly, from a similar effect in Robert Helpmann's ballet *Hamlet*: as did also the impressive ending, with Hamlet borne away on

the shoulders of the captains, his head hanging back as a pair of great gates were closed behind the sad procession. Here the sunset lighting was most beautiful, making up for earlier defects when the Ghost threw a substantial shadow.

The new director played safe at the Box Office by choosing two film stars as leading players.

In the case of Richard Burton this seemed, at first, of equivocal artistic value. His was a sturdy, "Desert Rat" Hamlet, monotonous of speech, without irony, and so free from subtlety and emotional complications that it was difficult to say if this was just miscasting or also lack of intelligence. His assets were an attractive mask and a strangely visionary expression of the eyes. But Hamlet is a man of many faces, not one; and this one palled after the splendid *fey* promise of the opening scene.

On the other hand it grew with time. This actor's voice had a hard edge in the upper register and a blasting *fortissimo*; but there were good notes in its lower ranges, only waiting to be developed, and his quietness could be pleasing. There were several original touches of emphasis: "Saw—*who?*", breathed out in incredulity; "the which *he* loved passing well", an unusual stress suggesting a tacit distrust of Polonius' love for *his* daughter and, viewed in a certain light, throwing some illumination on the "Nunnery" scene. And the brief caressing of Ophelia's cheek at "I did love you once", spoken perhaps in regret, was implicit in the characterisation of this Prince whose forthrightness and "freedom from all contriving" were those of a natural lover diverted only by circumstance, not some flaw in his own nature.

There have been princelier Hamlets, but the charm with the Player King was potent, and a kind of taciturn grief was projected sufficiently to make the performance not unmoving, although never touching the heights of emotional force or self-abandonment. This was the sanest of Hamlets, sad and unhumorous; Polonius evaded the tart side of his tongue and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could find no serpent sting beneath this guileless "Were you not sent for?"

Claire Bloom's Ophelia was "indeed distract": our modern producers see Laertes' "Rose of May" as a wilder and wilder hedge-row blossom, and no Ophelia these days is allowed to "turn to favour and to prettiness". Claire Bloom produced her frenzies valiantly, flowering to pathos at brief moments. And Fay Compton's speech at

her drowning was grieving music—the crown of her wan, haggard, truly tragic Queen. Claudius, a born Dogberry, moved through these proceedings with an air of genial bewilderment, as well he might.*

It was a reflection on the Old Vic's use of available talent that the two most authentic Shakespearean flashes, on the male side, came from actors of minor parts. John Neville's Fortinbras, in silver helmet, took the stage at the end with royal presence and a voice as beautiful as a 'cello; and Edgar Wreford, authentically senile although a little lacking in sardonic humour as the Gravedigger, gave the First Player dignity of carriage, moving eloquence of speech, and a highly sensitive intelligence. Both young actors came from repertory: Neville had just played an excellent Henry V with the Bristol Old Vic Company in a summer transfer of the production to the Old Vic Theatre; Wreford (in a brilliant "double") the two Dukes of Gloucester—the noble Humphrey and tortuous and ironic Richard "Crookback"—in the Birmingham Repertory productions of *Henry VI* which followed the Bristol *Henry V* at the same theatre.

Neville had the "romantic lead" in *All's Well That Ends Well*: that is, if the insufferable Bertram could be said to earn the title of hero. But this was a "fairy-tale" production of the bitter comedy, and Neville made a more graceful figure of Bertram than one would have thought possible, cleverly showing the young man's dependence on Parolles in his treatment of Helena, and a tiny instinct to yield to her which he mistakes for weakness, and showing, too, he could sing a serenade with a pleasant voice and musical "ear".

The play, with gay designs by the cartoonist Osbert Lancaster, yielded a fraction to this treatment: Claire Bloom's Helena, a lovely golden-haired Alice in Wonderland rapt in a young girl's first experience of love, reflected something of the enchantment of her Juliet and did much, by sheer disarming youthfulness, to explain Helena's importunacy and optimism in pursuit of her lover. In quietness she showed a new and greatly touching dignity.

Michael Hordern's Parolles, too, was more than flamboyant rogue—a serious actor at core, he could show the knave's tattered pathos in disgrace. His Polonius, sometimes over-fussy and not his best performance, had similar touches of humanity. But the dying King of

* The actor in fact gallantly took over the part at a fortnight's notice, when the player engaged for it decided not to proceed with it.

France (a fine and distinctive part for the right actor, a Milton or a Guinness) was butchered to make a producer's holiday, both illness and the Last Sacrament being treated as subjects for buffoonery; and this tang of bad taste and perversion of the lines gave cause for concern to all who love Shakespeare.

Speed and humour can be had at too dear a price; and a return of some poetry and dignity, without indiscriminate slashings of the text, seemed to be demanded to make the production of the full Folio a living expression of Shakespeare's greatness, not a perversion of it.

Antony and Cleopatra : King John

Before the war the performances at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon took second place, artistically, to those at the Old Vic. There were isolated exciting productions and a few good actors (Donald Wolfit laid the foundations of his reputation there), but restrictions of salary and rehearsal time meant that the greatest actors never appeared there.

It was in 1946, when Sir Barry Jackson took over, that the theatre began its renaissance. His young "discovery", Paul Scofield, leapt into prominence in a variety of parts; the finest designers and producers began to work at the theatre; and in 1948 the dancer-mime, Robert Helpmann, turned actor seriously, playing Shylock with Hebraic intensity, and a red-fox King John. He shared Hamlet with Scofield, and the contrasting performances became a subject of wide discussion.

In 1949 Sir Barry was succeeded as director by Anthony Quayle, who still held the office in 1956. John Gielgud and others have sprinkled the theatre with star-dust, and in 1953, while Quayle toured the Antipodes, Glen Byam Shaw, one of our best producers, carried on at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre with a cast headed by Peggy Ashcroft and Michael Redgrave. His most successful production, *Antony and Cleopatra*, was brought to the Princes Theatre in London on 4th November, 1953, at the end of the Stratford season and prior to a Continental tour. It played to packed audiences and drove home disturbingly how much Stratford now surpassed the Old Vic in production quality.

Byam Shaw had compassed the wide geographical range of this play in a set consisting only of two white Ionic columns, leaving a great

arch of space which, with silent swiftness, suggested the starlit and sun-hazed skies of Egypt, the silken tents of Rome, or the dipping sail of a Mediterranean galleon. The gorgeousness of the East emerged from this background, and when Cleopatra entered in a shimmer of ivory and silver, her attendants' lights hovering like stars, or sat in the royal splendour of death, robed like a queen in a golden throne, the imagination was held in wonder. The three women designers known as "Motley" produced, here, their loveliest work since *Richard of Bordeaux*, which in 1933 made Gielgud a star.

Shaw's taut, mobile and dramatic production was matched by the playing of the leading parts. Peggy Ashcroft and Michael Redgrave were a royal and handsome pair: their passion, ruinous yet defiant, took root, with an unexpected thrust of tenderness that made the tragedy more moving than I have ever seen it.

Peggy Ashcroft, in an auburn pony-tail, may not have the full cruelty, sensuality or caprice of Cleopatra by natural temperament; but here indeed we saw "Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt". Her rage, grief and majestic death reminded us that the best Juliet of our time has grown, with the years, into our greatest tragedienne. Redgrave, often a variable actor, was also at full stature, pointing the tragedy of a man who might have ruled the world, but instead is both ruled and destroyed by his own passions. His "Whither hast thou led me, Egypt?" was a stab of revelation.

There was a superb performance of the cold young Octavius Cæsar by Marius Goring: the future Emperor Augustus leapt from the compressed lips of this humourless boy. And Harry Andrews made strong metal of Enobarbus.

There was some weakness of voice and presence in the lower ranks; Birmingham at this time commanded greater virility and finer voices. But four ringing performances, and the lovely production, carried the play to triumph. The Oliviers had played in a vivid, more elaborate production of the play two years before, with a revolving stage. But neither its acting nor its crowded action could match the splendour of Stratford's simplicity, which set the verse free to glow and the lovers to flash and suffer with a new humanity.

"Motley" were less successful with the Old Vic's *King John*, produced by George Devine on 27th October. The thick, leaden façade of this season's permanent proscenium, which blocked back-

ground space in all the plays and had been rudely compared with Paddington Station, lay heavy on the action. There was much space-man armour, crude warfare and a general air of confusion.

It was, however, saved by several exceptionally good performances. Michael Hordern's King John, with a vein of iron Helpmann's lacked, outfaced Rome with craft and authority, and finally brought this wavering, neurotic murderer to life in a scene of rare excitement. Fay Compton's Constance had defiance and anguish, Edgar Wreford as Hubert quietly expressed a natural sympathy that balked at murder, and John Neville as Lewis the Dauphin, his keen profile cutting through space, again showed the sharp intelligence that informed all his work.

Richard Burton was the Falconbridge. The part suited him well in sturdiness and loyalty, but he lacked humour and *élan*, and was too inclined to let it "play itself".

Twelfth Night

"To the Duke's house", wrote Samuel Pepys in his Diary on twelfth night, 6th January, 1663, "and there saw *Twelfth Night* acted well, though it be but a silly play, and not related at all to the name or day."

The Old Vic in 1954 also added the play to its repertoire on twelfth night, and the title of the play—"or What You Will" is Shakespeare's nonchalant subtitle—doubtless derived from the fact that it was written for a twelfth night celebration some sixty years before Pepys saw it.

If plausibility of plot be the criterion of judgment, then *Twelfth Night*, like other comedies of Shakespeare, may well earn Pepys' epithet of "silly". Yet the poet John Masfield has described it as "the greatest English comedy", and Virginia Woolf has written that "the play seems as we read it to tremble perpetually on the brink of music".

It is a play, in fact, full of songs: the sad-gay songs of Feste the jester, breathing "Come away, death", or "Youth's a stuff will not endure". And its opening line—most famous opening line, surely, of any play ever written—is Orsino's "If music be the food of love, play on".

April sunlight, the prodigality of a summer garden, autumn's

melancholy, the brief black pinch of winter frost, jostle each other in a text which has the harmonic variety of an orchestral score. Roistering lurches against lovers' heartache, farce is brushed by the wing of spring lyricism.

The play for this reason is fantastically difficult to act or produce really well, and the Old Vic alone has had two or three unsuccessful attempts during the last few years. It is the task of producer and actors to try and achieve a balance between the poetry and the fun, and to keep the characters so real that we forget the absurdities of the girl-disguised-as-boy plot.

Denis Carey and the Old Vic Company made this attempt, and in the effort weighed down too much on the side of melancholy. But it is a fault on the good side, and refreshed an overworn play. Laughter was subdued; but the stage, in James Bailey's designs, had a blue-haze richness, and the romance sang.

Partly this was a matter of casting. In this the comedy side was weakest, though the producer (who was then director of the Bristol Old Vic) must take some blame for uninventiveness in "business".

Richard Burton bravely forsook romantic heroes for the ebullient Sir Toby; but he had as yet neither the technical skill nor the flexible personality to transform himself into such a ripe character part. He was likeable but rather amateurish in grey whiskers and padding. The best to be said for his performance was that it avoided the more regrettable excesses of drunken comedy that too often turn Sir Toby into a tiresome sot. This knight, at least, was gentleman enough to be acceptable as Olivia's uncle, and the Welsh in his portrayer enabled him to hold his part in a round with an heroic tenor dead on pitch (Paul Daneman's Feste, here a woeful clown apparently in love with Olivia, could have learned from him musically; it was a touching interpretation, which would have surprised Shakespeare greatly).

Sir Andrew, too, was wan comedy. But Michael Hordern was a Malvolio who rightly refused to sentimentalise; a sour, distrustful, shifty-eyed Puritan, born bait for the lovers of cakes and ale.

It was the romance, however, that lived in this production. John Neville has the height, looks, poise and beauty of speech to take the eye and ear in any Shakespearean hero. But he has more than these things: he has intelligence and depth of feeling. His Orsino developed subtly from a man in love with love to a man who can realise, with

a sudden piercing sadness, that "women are as roses, whose fair flower, Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour".

His growing apprehension of Viola made his final capitulation entirely understandable; and it sprang from this speech in which the actor made us aware of the first stirrings of a deeper love—the love that can outlive the physical beauty which alone attracted him in Olivia.

Claire Bloom's Viola, if not yet (shall we say) in full bloom, was an opening bud of disarming beauty. It needed more sparkle, but had the dark-eyed pathos of a waif gravely, tenderly and hopelessly in love. It managed to be boyish yet musical, and the scolding anger at Olivia for rejecting Orsino's love was psychologically sound and finely done. So, too, was the little stab of disappointment in her face when Olivia lifted her veil and she saw the beauty of her rival.

For once, also, the twin brother Sebastian (Robert Hardy) avoided girlish and foredoomed attempts to look like Viola at all costs, and gave us poetry, bewilderment and a flashing rapier. Shakespeare himself is said to have acted his devoted follower, the sea captain Antonio: it is doubtful whether he looked more handsome, and acted with more expressive vigour, than Edgar Wreford.

Coriolanus

The Old Vic added *Coriolanus* to its repertoire on 23rd February, in a richly costumed production in which tawny orange and cerise flamed against the golden Roman eagle or sea-green (if not incorruptible) Volscian banners. Designed by Audrey Cruddas, and produced by Michael Benthall, the action flowed and clashed, the mob bawled, and quite a deal of Shakespeare's tragedy of patrician pride emerged through the din.

Unfortunately the producer had heavily "cut" the final passages between the Volscian general, Aufidius, and Coriolanus, so that the Volscian's corroding jealousy, yet qualities as a worthy opponent, hardly appeared. The main conflict, therefore, centred on the proud Roman general and the citizens, here an unlikely, but vigorous, rabble.

Richard Burton, in by far his best performance this season, softened the edge of Coriolanus' revengeful pride, which leads him, Rome's greatest soldier, into treason against his country. He lacked the flaring



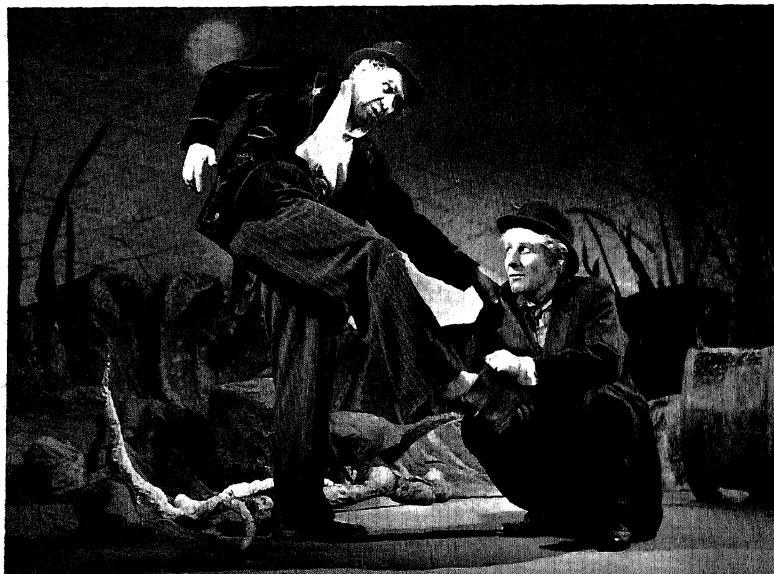
Angus McBean

The Queen and the Rebels (Ugo Betti), Haymarket, 1955. Irene Worth as Argia and Leo McKern as the Traveller.



Angus McBean

The Burnt Flower-Bed (Ugo Betti), Arts Theatre, 1955. Scene with (L. to R.) Yvonne Mitchell, Alexander Knox, Leo McKern, Edgar Wreford. Setting by Paul Mayo.



Houston Rogers

Waiting for Godot (Samuel Beckett), Arts Theatre, 1955. Paul Daneman (right) as Vladimir and Peter Woodthorpe as Estragon.



John Sarsfield

The Bishop's Boufire (Sean O'Casey), Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, 1955. "Lovely blossoms: red as the wrath of God. . . ." Cyril Cusack as Codger Sleechaun.



Coriolanus, Old Vic, 1954. Richard Burton as Coriolanus.

Angus McBean

temper which Olivier brought to his most powerful Old Vic performance, and his sympathetic, mystic mask was not truly in character; but he made a striking and moving figure, and held his scenes with authority.

Fay Compton's Volumnia was marred by stereotyped gestures (this monstrous warmonger is always hard to digest) but Claire Bloom was "gracious silence" indeed as the serene wife, Virgilia, and Gwen Cherrell, who had been a sunny-locked Olivia with a touch of Portia's radiance, brought charm and mockery to that prattling visitor, Valeria. Young William Squire gave a quiet, sardonic poise to the silver-haired patrician Menenius, and young Edgar Wreford as brilliantly assumed a crabbed and neurotic old age as the people's tribune, Sicinius.

This is a play whose political temper seems to vary with contemporary outlook. Today, the producer would suggest, we are conservative-minded: with the patricians, and against the people. Hence a more sympathetic Coriolanus than usual, though a later production may well reverse the political slant.

The Old Vic "Macbeth"

Not without cause, superstition dogs *Macbeth*. It is known to actors as an "unlucky" play, and to quote from it in the theatre is considered a matter of peril. Few great actors have wholly succeeded in it. The last time it was performed at the Old Vic, in 1937, the first night had to be postponed because Laurence Olivier had lost his voice, and in the short ensuing interim Lilian Baylis, founder of the theatre, died.

Perhaps that ill-fated production used up the Old Vic's quota of *Macbeth* misfortunes. For Michael Benthall's production, which opened the Old Vic London season on 9th September, 1954, following a triumphant staging at the Edinburgh Festival, escaped both private misfortune and public failure, and magnificently enhanced the reputation of its chief player, Paul Rogers, as an heroic classical actor.

The great Shakespearean scholar, A. C. Bradley, saw *Macbeth* as a tragedy suffused with the colour of blood: "the impression of a black night broken by flashes of light and colour". Benthall, always a bold (sometimes over-bold) producer, had not spared us the blood, which splashed the "seeling night" like the blood of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra in those Greek tragedies of which *Macbeth*, more than

any other of Shakespeare's tragedies, was the descendant. But the horror was rightly shot with imagination. The massive stone settings and subdued colours of Audrey Cruddas' designs seemed to emerge from the mysterious coldness of Scottish mist, the swirl of kilt and the wail of bagpipe drove the national atmosphere, and "black Macbeth" at his Coronation, robed in blood red, was a vivid and evil stain among the grey tartans.

In details, too, the producer had wonderfully knit the action of the play, and preserved its classical feeling in the impressive placing of Macbeth and his wife at their Coronation, arms aloft holding the crowns above their heads, in that triumphant sculptural pose made memorable by Sargent and Ellen Terry.

There was a plethora of noise in battle, and Macbeth died like a cornered wild beast, trapped in a ring of steel. But stillnesses pierced the tumult, Macduff's "O horror, horror, horror!" at the discovery of the murder was spoken quietly, in a deathly hush, and among a number of fine inventions to give mobility and continuity to the action, the most penetrating and moving was that which brought Macduff on in the English scene, even as the body of his murdered child was, almost before his eyes, carried off the stage.

What of Macbeth, elusive key to the tragedy, murderer, poet, conscience-haunted tyrant? This was, wrote Ivor Brown in his last theatre review in *The Observer*, "the whole Macbeth, reflective word-spinner as well as noble scoundrel, with a voice to render it and the physique to endure this most exhausting of the great Shakespearean rôles. . . . Never have I seen the part grow so vividly through nervous ambition to uneasy triumph and then to ageing disillusion and the bravest end".

That Rogers deserved such a tribute from the greatest and doyen of our dramatic critics was his highest claim to the tragic eminence his Macbeth, following a superb Shylock, Cassius and Henry VIII, now gained for him. Rogers is a robust and royal actor, and Macbeth needs both qualities. But he needs, too, intelligence and imagination of a high degree, and a voice and mind capable of clutching at the haunted music and disturbed conscience of the character as Macbeth clutches at the "air-borne dagger" that, in his fevered and distraught vision, leads him to the sleeping Duncan.

Rogers' intelligence was original and illuminating. He played a

great deal, and revealingly, with his back; his gesture after the murder, reddened hands and arms outstretched in a stylised yet eloquent pose, was imaginatively recalled while Macduff was discovering the body, and the murderer stood waiting with a white hand raised before his eyes, and the memory of recent blood-stains mirrored in his racked bodily tension; the restless eyes were those of one fearful of blood-bolstered phantoms; and the progression in ruthlessness was driven by a mental torment so deep that by the end this Macbeth, his black hair as blanched as his face, was stark mad—a madness anticipated in the trembling hands with which he fingered the hard-won crown at the end of the Banquet scene, and broken, with extraordinary poignancy, at “ Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow ”, when the man, lost in grief at the death of the Queen, sank to a seat with all fight gone out of him, pausing between the words as if shattered in mind, and breathing the hushed lines until they dwindled into the bleak whisper of “ signifying nothing ”.

Here Rogers touched poetry and bitter anguish; and after some performances his resonant voice came to linger with the right caress over Shakespeare’s “ shard-born ” phrases and “ drowsy hums ”. His poetic speech, which could always trumpet, had learned to sing.

The company was a fine one: Ann Todd’s red-haired, rapier-thrusting Lady Macbeth had a candle-flame of beauty that ignited this handsome Macbeth; Robert Hardy’s Duncan beautifully caught the disillusioned stab of “ He was a gentleman on whom I built An absolute trust ” (how magnificent the Grecian irony of this play in many moments such as this, which is followed almost immediately by Macbeth’s entrance and his equally trustful acceptance by the King); Paul Daneman was a handsome and well-spoken Malcolm; and John Neville’s deeply sincere, moving and intelligent Macduff—as quick to reflect suspicion as grief—deserved its nightly ovation.

The Taming of the Shrew : Love’s Labour’s Lost

The Old Vic ended the year 1954 on a gay note. *The Taming of the Shrew* has always been a popular work with audiences, in spite of the reiterated doubts of masculine critical opinion about its soundness on the feminist question. Strangely enough, women take this assault upon their equality of status with far more equanimity than their more

sensitive male companions. A lurking psychological streak still responds to cave-man methods of amorous approach, and they can relish Katharina's not-easily-tamed spirit, and the joyous good humour which Elizabethan, more than modern, men probably appreciated behind Petruchio's tempestuous wooing.

If there is cruelty in this play it is no more than that which impregnates the vitality of many a modern farce and cartoon; and the contemporary tendency to "play up" Petruchio's genuine admiration at first sight of his victim—"But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom!"—is by no means entirely a superimposition on the play's text and spirit.

Paul Rogers, a black-haired, devil-may-care Petruchio, is an actor of virility and verve with a warm and even sensitive core: behind the flash of his white teeth, and the gay lift of his head, we therefore felt a strange little sun of tenderness, with the result that this shrew-tamer could coo briefly in an embrace, and melt his reluctantly mesmerised mate with the vision of a dove in an eagle's nest. It was a nice feature of Ann Todd's spirited shrew that she showed a response to these provocative little glimpses of romantic ardour, and before the end, appreciative of her wooer's reckless style of humour, joined happily in the masquerade his ebullient spirit devised.

Not all the performances were good, but Robert Hardy's moon-struck Hortensio, with an Aguecheek-like head of flax on a distaff, lingers endearingly in mind, and Eric Porter, a young character actor, gave Christopher Sly an original note of drunken but wistful wonder. The Sly scene was cut after the first night, which may have given the play-within-a-play cohesion, but robbed the production of one of its few poetic notes: the winter carolling, to Julian Slade's music, of the company arriving in the snow at the Lord's house.

Elsewhere Denis Carey's production, in brightly coloured stylised designs by Kenneth Rowell, had some neat and new touches, among them the appearance of a string of sausages at Petruchio's "What dogs are these?", and the translation of Lucentio's sneeze into his "disguise" name of Licio. No producer in recent years has resisted the temptation to play games with this play, and Carey's and Rowell's over-fantastication must therefore be accepted as inevitable.

The play goes with a swing as long as Petruchio and Katharina hold the scene, but no producer can overcome the handicap of those pas-

sages where lesser characters describe, at great length, amusing action which the audience would far rather have seen themselves.

The fair Shakespearean hand is far more perceptible in *Love's Labour's Lost*. It is a play, for a modern audience, with too many scholarly quibbles, yet with touches of poetry and youthful romance in which embers that were to burst into flame in *Romeo and Juliet* glimmer like fireflies in a forest. Once rarely performed, its fresh humours and flowering Spring have captured the imagination of several modern producers, notably Tyrone Guthrie, Peter Brook and Hugh Hunt, whose picturesque production for the Old Vic at the New Theatre, in 1949, is still a charming memory.

Unfortunately, Frith Banbury's imagination, in his Old Vic production in October 1954, seemed never to have been enflamed, and drab green settings by Cecil Beaton, with garish costumes deficient in grace of line, helped to dampen a production which was quickly withdrawn.

The company, well-cast in *Macbeth*, seemed here misfitted, and the lack of mellowness of speech, especially among the women, cracked the shining sweetness of the play's word-music.

An exception was John Neville's fair and handsome Berowne: a lyrical actor who here made a gallant attempt at gaiety and fire, and caught the Verona-like magic of—

“as sweet and musical
As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair”.

Paul Rogers, who played the part in Hunt's production, repeated his fantastic Spaniard, Don Armado: a sweetly-melancholy performance with an eye watery with sentimental love, and a mincing, bewhiskered sense of importance upheld through trial and indignity. Virginia McKenna, in her first Old Vic appearance, was a vivacious Rosaline with a brittle but clear voice; and Laurence Hardy's monumentally solemn and conceited Holofernes deserved a better setting.

“*Richard II*” : London and Birmingham

A quarter of a century ago at the Old Vic, John Gielgud leapt to fame as Shakespeare's Richard II. It now seems likely that another young actor—only a year or two older than Gielgud was then—will be

remembered as having established his "star" quality in the same part at the same theatre.

John Neville has been compared fairly widely to John Gielgud. Certainly there is a physical resemblance: the tall, slender royalty of figure, the finely-structured cheek-bones and noble, jutting nose, the honey-blond hair, the long, artistic fingers, the sensitivity of the face and lyric music of the voice. It is strong enough, in fact, to have deceived some critics into thinking Neville models his acting on that of Gielgud.

This is far from the truth; an actor working continuously in repertory and for some years in the provinces has no opportunity (critics often forget) to see and study closely the best contemporary actors, and Neville could scarcely remember (even if, as a small child, he saw) Gielgud's last performance as Richard in 1937. As the narrow dark Slav eyes are his own—a strange offset to the Scandinavian fairness of skin and hair—so are his special qualities of intelligence and projection.

His conception of Richard, in fact, is far closer to that of Maurice Evans than that of Gielgud. Evans played the part at the Old Vic in 1935, and later became famous in America in the rôle. Where Gielgud concentrated on the pathos and verbal music, Evans' was the performance of variety and anguish: his voice, like a silver trumpet, could blazon rage as well as grief, his intelligence in gesture and phrasing was infinitely subtle, and more than any other Richard he caught the sardonic thrust of the King's wit.

This vein of irony is what emerged so characteristically from Neville's performance; and though his voice, like Gielgud's, is tenderer in its melody—how beautifully he can caress a phrase like "mounting larks should sing . . ."—again and again he would echo, unconsciously, a special word-emphasis of Evans. "We will descend and *fold* him in our arms"; "Here, cousin, *seize* the crown"; "*Fair* cousin! Why, I am greater than a King"—it is the same lash of disdain, quietly, amusedly almost, taking the edge off Bolingbroke's triumph.

For in spite of the "rash fierce blaze of riot" that was his ruin, and the difficult bridge the actor must try and build between Richard as King and in defeat, the foundation of Shakespeare's Richard is his superiority in intelligence over his rivals.

It is this penetration of other men's minds, through an ironic

quickness of intellect, that Neville established so clearly from the start. The fatal sense of royal omnipotence, too, the flaring temper, later the fine-nerved reflection of emotions fluctuating like the tides—these were combined in a manner entirely his own. And never before have I seen a Richard so illuminatingly convey, by his reactions, his share in Gloucester's murder, and distrust that Mowbray may have let the cat out of the bag.

But this was a performance to be studied for its imaginative details no less than its poignancy. Richard's troubled conscience after his banishment of Mowbray was such a detail; so were the impatience with which he greeted reminders of his grandfather's greatness, his absolute feyness at "From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day", his touching of his crown in his taunt to Bolingbroke:

Up, cousin, up;—your heart is up, I know,
Thus high at least although your knee be low.

(it was Evans' gesture), his crucified pose, arms outstretched, at "my sour cross". A glance, a tautening of a finger on his robe, could speak volumes Shakespeare left unsaid.

Evans' "We were not born to sue, but to command" had a clarion ring: Neville suggested, equally compellingly, a rage all the more powerful for its pent-up utterance. These flashing hysterical tempers are historical: Gordon Daviot in her play *Richard of Bordeaux* made use of an authentic scene of this nature at Eltham, and Neville's performance suggested he had studied more than Shakespeare's Richard.

He finely differentiated between the lovely word-spinner and the real man suffering passionately under the phrases; the result was he could catch at the heart and at the same time, with intellectual detachment, establish a complex yet dramatically complete character.

The performance won a roaring ovation on the first night, 18th January, 1955; and it continued to grow in strength and emotion. A star—a new romantic classical actor—was being born.

Neville's triumph overshadowed a competent production by Michael Benthall and several good performances, such as the Bolingbroke of Eric Porter, the distressed Queen of Virginia McKenna, and amusing York of Michael Bates. The dim Gothic set of Leslie Hurry allowed for some imposing groupings, and lighting and costumes preserved the mediæval colour.

A strong and eloquent company, at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, also concluded their season in July 1955 with *Richard II*, produced by the acknowledged master among producers of our classical histories, Douglas Seale. This attracted wide interest, and proved a glowing historical prelude to his vividly studied productions of *Henry IV, Parts I and II*, produced at the Old Vic a month or two earlier.

It was, in this sense, particularly interesting to see the way, through Bolingbroke in the later stages of *Richard II*, he began to develop the theme of the responsibilities of kingship, and its attendant conspiracies, already weighing heavily on the new-crowned Henry IV, and Alan Bridges as Bolingbroke caught at the future too in his sudden fond smile when speaking of his son's wildness.

Seale and his Richard, Jack May, like Benthall and Neville, made some point of Richard's guilty share in the matter of Gloucester's murder, and added to it a penetrating and credible suggestion, conveyed in a swift interchange of glances, that Richard and Gaunt (always his favourite uncle) had come to some prior agreement about the curtailing of the Mowbray-Hereford duel and banishment of Mowbray. May's significant stress on his "heavier" sentence, directed at Gaunt, became in this interpretation the guilt on the inevitable banishment also, for a lesser term, of Gaunt's son.

There was much in May's playing of the earlier scenes which linked with that of Neville: neither actor sentimentalised Richard's vindictiveness and irresponsibility, although May's turn to the Queen and tenderly spoken "Come, my Queen", after Gaunt's death, deliberately tried to provide a link—never easy—with the later Richard. Like Neville, he did not miss the sarcasm, and his intellectual grasp of the character was never in doubt.

On his Henry VI, one would have said this actor had both the personality and emotional flexibility for Richard. In fact, his performance was disappointing in some ways; too slowly, evenly and strongly declaimed, with much force and anger but insufficient variability of vocal volume and poetic mood. It was a rhetorical rather than a lyrical performance, with a wig and mask that gave the figure of the King a curiously waxen-image appearance, not fitting with the firm and beautiful voice. J. C. Trewin thought otherwise, and praised it highly; but in spite of its brilliance and shrewdness, and an occasional

line of piercing imagination (like the delicately soft, unexpected "Let it sound no more" at the music in the last soliloquy), it did not to me seem to move on the same plane as the actor's memorable Henry VI and Agamemnon in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and as his sensitive performances of Uncle Vanya and Dobelle in *The Moon in the Yellow River* are reported to have done.

There was a fine John of Gaunt by Bernard Hepton—much finer than the London one*—a notable Aumerle by Richard Pasco (the retention of the scene of his treason and his mother's pleading for him, usually cut, brought the part and political pattern of the play into focus), and a striking character "double" of Mowbray and the Bishop of Carlisle by Alan Edwards. Nancie Jackson, with her gift for emotion that rings true, fully justified the restoration of the Duchess of York's pleading scene, and Doreen Aris was a grave and restrained young Queen.

Once again Finlay James had designed a picturesque and useful setting, with a gallery at one side and a staircase at the other, behind which the backcloth glowed blue or black in alternating effect. Among Seale's interesting touches were Gaunt's attack of angina at the end of the banishment scene, casting the shadow of his coming death; and Richard's putting out of the candles in his cell to await his murderers—a moment of suspense. Historically apt, too, was Henry IV's start of superstitious fear at the sight of Richard's coffin and his murderers. The pastel colouring was not always ideal for this play, but Seale used his groups effectively and made some striking pictorial impressions with lighted candles.

Henry IV : As You Like It

The last two productions of the Old Vic 1954–55 season proved its greatest triumph. This was in part to be expected, since the plays were the two histories of *Henry IV*, presented in serial form, as it were, on successive nights; and Douglas Seale, the producer, had proved himself the most brilliant living interpreter of Shakespeare's histories with the three parts of *Henry VI* presented by the Birmingham Repertory Company at the Old Vic during Coronation year.

* Paul Rogers' exquisitely sensitive study of Gaunt was not seen at the Old Vic until the revival of *Richard II* the following year.

Henry IV was Seale's first London Old Vic production (he was still attached to Sir Barry Jackson's Birmingham theatre), and his production of *Henry IV, Parts I and II*, showed all the mastery of historic forces, and the living men behind them, which characterised the three parts of *Henry VI*. Only the costumes, by Audrey Cruddas, were less good: dull in colour, and without the visual suggestiveness to outweigh their ludicrous lack of a sense of the period on the field of battle. The permanent setting was also rather cramping and cumbrous, although its steps and rostrums gave opportunities for swift changes of action and groupings. It is unusual, however, for a battle to be fought on a staircase in darkness, *before* "first light"!

Perhaps it was the tavern and comedy scenes, superbly characterised by Paul Rogers as Falstaff, Paul Daneman as Justice Shallow (a dry and crackling study in the sere and yellow leaf by a personable young actor, most wittily pointed), Gwen Cherrell as a soused and flame-haired Doll Tearsheet, and others, that most fired the stage in these productions. Here were Eastcheap and the English rural scene in their habit as they lived—more Elizabethan, perhaps, than Plantagenet, but warm with the sense of living, rowdy, rumbustious, sentimental, brave.

John Neville was a good, witty Hotspur, not a great one (his startling transformation into the roaring Cockney Pistol of Part II entranced this graceful young actor's growing army of "fans"), and Eric Porter's sober and well-characterised King, fine in death, somehow never completely held the stage. In spite of the splendid fight between Hotspur and Prince Hal at the end of Part I—both tiring until the effort to deliver a blow was a matter of sheer will-power surmounting physical fatigue—the historic picture was not so urgently alive, partly because in the middle and lower rungs of this company Seale could not find the fine actors and fine voices which vitalised his Birmingham productions of *Henry VI* (the actors and the voices were still in the main at Birmingham).

But his supreme achievement in these productions was to have illuminated the plays' greatness as a study in kingship: the growth of Prince Hal from a roistering bud of royalty who must—and already feels he must—flower into the complete ruler of State.

It was the genius of this production, and its acting, that this moving sense of royal fulfilment was discernible from almost the first scene and not only the Prince but Falstaff himself (uneasily) was aware of it. How

mystic, almost, that rapt, blunt "I will" of the Prince when Falstaff, in the mockery of the tavern, suggests, while mimicking his royal father, that he must throw off his disreputable companions. Robert Hardy did this superbly, and throughout his golden-haired, golden-tongued Prince suggested a grace, fire and sense of mission which magnificently endorsed the theme.

His personal triumph was shared by Paul Rogers, whose Falstaff remained knightly in decadence, and whose rich charm explained the fascination of the old sinner (and Hal's difficulty in throwing him off) without hiding the shrewd cynic (how sharply, beneath the genial bluster, he weighed up Shallow!) and the suppressed sense of decline, and coming betrayal, beneath it.

His excitement at the news of Hal's succession had in it that tiny extra flare and fever that spring from under-, rather than over-, confidence in his enlarged fortunes. But the old reprobate loved Prince Hal sincerely enough, and the blow when it came struck to the heart. Nothing could be finer than Rogers' subtle indication of this, and his flicking finger to his small page to run away and save himself as the Lord Chief Justice (a dour and finely spoken performance by John Woodvine) took him into custody.

The ringing success of Seale's productions a little overshadowed the pastel-coloured and charming pastoral made by Robert Helpmann of *As You Like It*, the previous Vic production. With settings in eighteenth-century-style penmanship by a young Italian artist, Domenico Gnoli, it unpretentiously survived an only average all-round performance, irradiated by John Neville's golden Orlando, "as sweet and musical as bright Apollo's lute strung with his hair", and Virginia McKenna's vernal, merry Rosalind, Botticelli-like in beauty and grace. No two lovers can have been physically so charmingly matched: the union gave the whole play a kind of *Primavera* freshness, with these two, slender and fair as daffodils, fluttering and dancing in the Shakespearean breeze. Gwen Cherrell was a delightful Celia, Paul Rogers a wry and inventive Touchstone, and Eric Porter's silver-grey Jaques, quietly rueful and humorous in the "All the world's a stage" speech, gave newness to the hackneyed although lacking the bitter edge of melancholy. The rest must be silence: with neither Daneman nor Hardy in the cast the deficiencies of voice and assured technique among the medium players were only too apparent.

Much Ado About Nothing : The Merchant of Venice

During the Summer of 1955 the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which presented Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in a number of plays at Stratford-on-Avon, sent out a second company, with John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft as its distinguished leaders, to tour Europe and the English provinces. During July and August this company came to rest at the Palace Theatre in London, playing *Much Ado About Nothing* and *King Lear* alternate weeks.

Gielgud's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* was first seen in Stratford-on-Avon in 1949 and 1950, and had already been presented by Gielgud at the Phoenix Theatre in London. It is now looked on as a "definitive" production, and its elegances of wit and style, with delightful designs by Mariano Andreu, were burnished by the equally definitive performances of Gielgud as Benedick and Peggy Ashcroft as Beatrice.

Gielgud has now developed the early "soldier" side of Benedick, so that it is a portrait in the round, justifying the high tributes of the man's colleagues and showing the complete mastery and ease born of twenty-five years of experience in comedy technique and the pointing of wit. Only the underlying seriousness of the Church scene—Benedick's true solidity and shrewdness of character appear here—did not quite come off on the first night, and the response to Beatrice's "Kill Claudio" got a laugh: a much younger actor at the Bristol Old Vic, some months previously, had carried the difficult passage through with great sympathy. But Gielgud's "duel" scene with Claudio that followed was wonderfully done, and his touch elsewhere probably unapproachable by any other actor of our time.

Peggy Ashcroft's Beatrice demands equal superlatives: it shimmers rather than glitters, its dancing stars lit by the moon, not the "garish sun". And it has charming and revealing touches that pierce the outer sheen and show a Beatrice suddenly shy of her ribald tongue before the Prince: as ardent in love as spirited in speech. A woman, in fact, of character and intelligence, deep ingrained beneath a gay and independent spirit.

Unfortunately the supporting company seemed uncreative in comparison; the play, in fact, all-round was far better characterised and spoken by the Bristol Old Vic Company in October 1954. In this a

new Shakespearean player flowered: Rosemary Harris, London "star" of *The Seven Year Itch*, whose Beatrice had not the full period style or sparkle, yet had beauty, elegance, and an extraordinarily touching sense of love blossoming, in wonder, through raillery. She was finely matched by her Benedick—the chameleon Edgar Wreford in unexpectedly gay, romantic fettle, with a tenderness responsive to hers. Ronald Hines was the most believable and imaginative Don John, and John Kidd, an experienced older actor, one of the best Leonatos I have seen: Hines playing this normally flat, black villain not as something strayed into Shakespeare from the Elizabethan equivalent of *East Lynne*, but as a nerve-tensed neurotic with a sensitive facial "tic", brooding on and magnifying a bitter resentment of his bastardy.

So elaborate a play needs longer rehearsal even than three-weekly repertory affords; but John Moody's simple production allowed the play to sustain its own balance of comedy and drama, and Patrick Robertson's original setting of Gothic arches made of white string, with glowing blue backgrounds, was charming and allowed for swift, eager action.

Robertson, with transparent gauzes which conveyed us in a flash from Venice to Belmont, also helped Moody in his later Shakespearean production, *The Merchant of Venice*, in March 1955.

A new Shylock anywhere always arouses interest; and although Moody's intention had been to spotlight Antonio as the play's leading figure, the richer characterisation of the Jew inevitably carries more weight on the stage. Nevertheless, this more balanced interpretation of the play made some effect at certain moments, and both Michael Allinson's noble Antonio and Edgar Wreford's villainous, gloatingly amusing Shylock loyally tried to support it.

Wreford's was a performance of remarkable integrity, consistent in its refusal to play for sympathy, brilliantly characterised, rich in vindictive passion. Not the ebony-haired, aristocratic Hebrew we have come to expect on the modern stage, but an ugly, round-shouldered figure of sardonic comedy, with dark red hair turning grey, who for all his obvious wealth lacked social pride, and drove a bargain with the same ruthless enjoyment and vitality that characterised his thirst for the merchant's flesh. If the greatness of Shakespeare the humanist flashes involuntarily through the Jew, this was not the interpretation to show it; but within its chosen range it was dramatically and amusingly

successful, with enough power and realistic detail to overshadow the play in its big moments, as Shakespeare if not the producer intended.

Rosemary Harris, with a little of the Ellen Terry radiance which is the main requirement of a part overrated for its acting opportunities, was a Portia of blonde beauty and rising wit; and Perlita Neilson as Nerissa, Paul Lee as Arragon and the Duke of Venice, Ronald Hines, black-clad and curiously compelling, as Salerio, John Humphry as Bassanio and Bruce Sharman as Young Gobbo stood out in speech or characterisation.

The Gielgud "King Lear"

The impression of acting and vocal weakness discernible in the Shakespeare Memorial production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Palace Theatre was disastrously reinforced in *King Lear*, a tragedy demanding a vital spirit of evil in a number of its characters—Shakespeare's externalisation of the wanton forces of destiny wreaked through human agency. Edmund, a Renaissance spirit, should have a Borgian virility in devilry, and great personal magnetism besides. Gloucester's agony should, in its way (both fall through their own stupidity and their own children), complement Lear's. Kent should be a rock of friendship that can brandish the rage of the just as well as the compassion of the truly good and perceptive.

Some critics ascribed these failures to the production of George Devine, which certainly showed powerlessness to evoke character conflict, although it made the effect of Gloucester's appearance on his son Edgar, in the storm, for once unusually clear. Most abuse was heaped on the decoration of the Japanese artist, Isamu Noguchi, whose designs were evolved, according to a programme note signed by himself, Gielgud and Devine, to remove the tragedy into the "timeless, universal and mythical" region to which, as poetic drama, it belongs.

No design can smudge really fine acting, and Noguchi's universe of a Japanese Picasso, with simple shapes sliding into position to form new combinations for new scenes, had some striking and even valuable qualities. Some artistic beauties of form and colour could not be denied; the play's geographical problems were smoothly and swiftly solved by this adaptation of Japanese Nō play technique; and even the spaceman note of some of the male costumes would not have overwhelmed really front-rank Shakespearean actors.

Stylisation (his hair flowed white like that of the Old Man of the Sea) certainly did not overwhelm Gielgud's; but by some curious miscalculation on the actor's part he produced the wrong interpretation for the production.

This was his fourth Lear, and his most realistic. The entrance, once a pillar of pride, was now that of a senile and already mentally unbalanced old man. As such the character was studied throughout with clinical care and imagination, deliberately forgoing heroic poetry except for a few moments in the storm, heart-wringing and terrifying in its thwarted tenderness and decay, right out of this world (as it always was in the past) in the reconciliation with Cordelia and at her death. But small in scale, exquisite in its detail as a Persian miniature, torn but subtle in anguish, it battled meaninglessly against the coldly stylised production and vast cavern of the Palace auditorium.

Only Claire Bloom's Cordelia, with its Nefertiti beauty of face and serene truth, seemed to me to touch the same orbit of human feeling. But Anthony Nicholls spoke well and acted with sympathy as Kent (though not very satisfactorily managing the rustic transformation) and Powys Thomas in the small part of a follower of Lear also revealed an attack and audibility the players of more important characters might well have emulated.

Like a number of actors—Edgar Wreford, Keith Michell, Derek Godfrey—whose work has achieved prominence during the past two years at Stratford or the Bristol Old Vic, Thomas is a product of the Old Vic Dramatic School and Theatre Centre directed, until its dissolution in 1951, by Michel St. Denis, Glen Byam Shaw and George Devine. St. Denis believed it would take ten years for the influence of this training to be felt and its students reach the apex of their talent through the necessary experience, and already his prophecy is beginning to prove remarkably accurate. The distressing thing is that there is no younger generation of students to follow this batch from the School's first few years of tuition; once again our theatre training lacks coherent direction and our actors a recognised system and style.

"The Winter's Tale" : London and Bristol

The Winter's Tale, added to the Old Vic repertoire in November 1955, had not been seen at that theatre since 1935, but a notable

West End production in 1950, with John Gielgud as Leontes, has brought the play more strongly into focus than in the past.

The play has often seemed distasteful or implausible to many because of the unexplained jealousy which seizes the Sicilian King at the beginning of the play, driving him on his twisted course until the Queen who loves him is brought to trial, humiliation and apparent death.

Leontes has been taken as a lesser Othello; but in this age of psychiatry and the modern "mixed-up kid" it is easier to accept, if not fully to understand, this tortuous obsession about an imaginary grievance, and to realise that Leontes' suspicious and sick mind is something entirely different from Othello's passionate and guileless jealousy.

Jealousy, in fact, merely happens to be the spring that sets Leontes' mental machinery in motion (to one of his nature it could be almost anything); and lacerated pride, a sense of inadequacy (did Leontes doubt his own ability to father the child his wife is carrying? It would be one recognisable modern root of his behaviour) and a latent egoism and its natural expression, the abuse of power, are all involved in his chaotic spiritual degradation.

Leontes has loved his wife, and like all psychopaths he suffers in his delusion. But what we see on the stage is the reverse side of the coin; the hate springing from a sense of betrayal, which in one so used to power can only find its outlet in tyranny and revenge.

Such split and maladjusted natures vary in degree, and outside their obsession may be charming, likeable and generous. Both the shocked attitude of Leontes' Court and his wife's continuing love suggest that the normal Leontes is a very different person from the one Shakespeare has chosen to present at this unhappy point in his life. And deep within his subconscious that better person stirs. Thus the streak of cruelty, the passion for self-justification and the need for Hermione's public trial and shame.

Leontes *must* be in the right, his wrongs proved to the world; for beneath his egoism and blind conviction lurks, unrecognised, the seed of pity and uncertainty.

Paul Rogers as Leontes magnificently realised this when he refused to look at Hermione throughout the scene of her trial; to look might be to pity, to yield. His King suffered movingly, and had a high rage;

the sting behind the moral poison—the black will in power—just evaded him facially; his is not by nature a “dark” and unbalanced personality, though his actor’s imagination can fly at the complex and spiritually tormented. The emphasis on the man’s own grief in the first half of the play also made for less contrast in the third, where Gielgud moved like one drained of sin, a mystic silver figure in whom even remorse had softened into a resigned serenity.

It seems certain that at one period of his life Shakespeare must have come in contact with one of these unhappily cleaved personalities; Leontes, Angelo, Cassius—these are all men with a “chip”, at war with themselves, although all (and here is Shakespeare’s genius) are highly individual. Only in Iago do we see the twist at work on a wholly ignoble nature, with the egoism and lust for power in conscious control.

In Iago the Hyde has at last obliterated the Jekyll (he leads naturally to the despair of Lear’s “Is there any force in nature that makes these hard hearts?”); but that there is food in Iago too for psychological thought has been demonstrated by Rogers in a superb performance on television, one which in powerful use of close-up by cameramen and actor proved revealing in the same way as the film Cassius of John Gielgud.

If Shakespeare knew the man, he also knew the victim; from the curt simplicity of Marianna’s “I want no other and no better man”, to Hermione’s long, proud and still loving speech of defence in her trial, he shows a compassion for the bruised which never degenerates to the maudlin; indeed it is the refusal of his women to pander to the obsession that destroys them, their self-defence being a tacit if gentle rebuke (Desdemona has a quiet “I have not deserved this”) that enflames the resentment still further.

Hermione’s plea of guiltlessness is as maddening to Leontes as Paulina’s lashing scorn. But it is a wonderful moment for the actress to flower as a suffering woman instead of (too often a defect of Hermiones) a statue-in-embryo, and Wendy Hiller’s performance at the Vic was heartwrenching: the verse broken by the force of anguish but surely here rightly broken, for the woman’s dignity hangs on the thread of physical collapse.

Margaret Rawlings was a termagant Paulina but no other performances were very notable, and John Neville as a clever, spiv-like

Autolycus failed to "lift" the mid-way pastoral with sufficient vitality.

But Michael Benthall's production, with rich Minoan designs, finely suggested a civilisation retrogressing towards decadence, an atmosphere which exactly fits Leontes' Court and became imaginatively stylised in the last scene when Leontes was discovered on his throne, like a frozen king, with icicles and cobwebs misting the ceiling (it was the exact position in which we had left him sixteen years before). For the play is surely, like so many later plays of Shakespeare, a mystery or allegory, with the warm pring blood of a new generation melting, at the last, the winter of their elders' strife.

In May 1955, the Bristol Old Vic had also performed this play, with Rosemary Harris as Hermione and Michael Allinson—an intelligent and well-graced actor always, but inexperienced in the complex passions of a Leontes—as the King. Allinson played the last scenes beautifully, but his darkly-chiselled earlier ones, though well contrasted, lacked the full temperamental range and agonies of a man who suffers while inflicting suffering on others. He was not helped by a production which failed in drama; thinly grouped, and slow and heavy in progress even during the highlight of the trial. The sheep-shearing scenes, less sophisticated in *décor* than the London Old Vic's architectural haystacks, altogether went with a lighter spirit, and Edward Hardwicke and Perlita Neilson as Florizel and Perdita had a graver, yet not less spring-like, charm than their attractive London prototypes, John Fraser and Zena Walker.

With acting blood in duplicate in his veins (his father is Cedric Hardwicke and his mother Helena Pickard), Hardwicke, just emerging from small parts, showed every sign of honouring family history. With intelligence, looks, a good voice and natural ease and presence, he made of Florizel a virile young hero whose poetry rang clearly, and would in time gain flexibility. His Perdita, Perlita Neilson, matched him in charm of appearance and vocal clarity, bringing April sunlight to a production which never caught the fires of jealousy and upheaval, yet in the end brought us something of the fairy-tale beauty of the play.

The imaginative touches—Time's snow melting into the arbours of Bohemia, the candlelit serenity of the Statue scene—came late; but Rosemary Harris' Hermione, sad rather than anguished, had a moving

grace, Paul Lee's deeply humanised Old Shepherd and Mary Savidge's Paulina ranked with the best, and Edgar Wreford's gipsy-skinned rogue Autolycus snapped up Bohemia's "unconsidered trifles" with a gay song and lusty vitality: exactly the note needed for the dramatic contrasts of this play.

Henry V : Othello

The Old Vic season during the Winter and Spring of 1955-56 was distinguished by two new productions—*Henry V* and *Othello*—marking the return of Richard Burton to the company.

Burton opened on 13th December as Henry V, a part he had already played at Stratford-on-Avon some years ago. His performance, richened by time, is now authoritative and mystically dedicated, with a leavening of humour which it is generally agreed was lacking in the past.

It is a character to which he is in personality admirably suited, his fine face and mesmeric eyes giving the King a romance, soldierliness and sense of spiritual force in which, perhaps, lie the keys to Shakespeare's glamorised conception. His carriage, with downthrust head, lacks full royalty, his voice still has hard patches, and the subtlety of thought in the speech on ceremony escaped him at first (one remembers both Olivier and Scofield in this): although later performances showed a more varied and most moving grip of the soliloquy.

In fire and music of speech John Neville's Chorus surpassed the King, and his bright and eager air shone in a production not notable for vocal eloquence, but admirably acted by the "lower orders" who are the staple of Henry's army: the perfect Fluellen of Dudley Jones, the Fate-crushed Nym of Job Stewart, the Blimpish Gower of Derek Francis, the luggage boy of John Greenwood and the Mistress Quickly of Rachel Roberts, grieving at Falstaff's end.

Michael Benthall's production had a colourful simplicity, with a great mediæval map as backcloth and some effective groupings.

Othello gained much publicity from the nightly interchange of the rôles of Othello and Iago by Burton and Neville. Both these young actors lack the maturity, weight and full passion for Othello, a part for which Paul Rogers should, after his *Macbeth*, have been the obvious choice. But they were admirably contrasted in personality, make-up

and even clothes, and between them struck off illuminating sparks from the character.

Burton, black and solid, progressed most in succeeding performances: though hang-dog in the first scenes (with one excellent subtlety, a glance at his chest at the taunt of "sooty bosom"), he developed the power to grasp at the barbarian, and to move and excite in anguish and uncontrolled passion. The voice, too, had a new 'cello richness. His quivering hands at Iago's insinuation of Desdemona's sleep with Cassio were nerve-tormented, and absolutely in character.

Neville, lean of face and Semetic of feature, rightly chose the Arabic rather than the negroid conception, and he won in royalty of bearing and nobility of speech. This was the civilised Moor, tender in his love, sweet in recollection (the touch of affectionate humour in "at this hint, I spake", was characteristic). Though splendid in anger and intellect, always poignant and true in grief, the civilisation and natural refinement were never fully pierced by the barbarian, the noble mind remained unthrown.

Neville, on the other hand, was the sharper Iago, fully characterised as a rough diamond with cropped hair and wind-reddened face: a World War II soldier who might be the equivalent of the Renaissance mercenary, lacking advancement and education and imbued by the Borgian spirit of devilry (the Borgias were upstart adventurers, not the true nobility like the Szorfas).

If one can accept the lack of period frills this is as authentic a picture of Iago as any: the rough diamond accepted for outspoken honesty, quick of brain, and with a gnawing "chip" as preferment goes to the "public school" man. Neville's hard, discontented droop of the mouth, his black and sullen facial reaction to Cassio's line about "the Lieutenant being saved before the Ancient", drove home the source of evil and never relaxed the sense of the "chip" enlarged to a ravine by the pressure of frustration and cold envy of heart.

Burton is a romantic rather than character actor, perhaps our modern equivalent of Lewis Waller rather than Tree or Irving. His Iago was handsomely guileless and full of charm, except that his sadness had an interesting psychopathic ring, and his emphasis on "*She must change, she must . . .*", like the talk on sex, had an element of festering disgust that gained a rather frightening suggestiveness at a moment, as his poison worked, where he lightly caressed Othello's

hair. Somewhere, here, was the seed of a characterisation not yet come to flower. The humour, like Olivier's in the part long ago, was played too obviously to the audience, and too pleasant altogether.

Rosemary Harris' Desdemona was memorably beautiful of face and had cajolry as well as love and pain; Richard Wordsworth's Roderigo was a humanised gem of comedy-with-pathos; and Wendy Hiller's strongly-drawn Emilia superbly illumined the relationship with Iago and in the last scene struck fire from the tinder of the woman's grief, rage and disillusion. The production was noticeable for some odd re-writing and textual "cuts", and the sun-drenched curtains of Cyprus looked tattered against the gorgeous costumes.

The "Moscow" Hamlet

For the first time an English theatre poster was able to advertise a production as "prior to London and Moscow". It was no surprise, therefore, that provincial playgoers flocked to see Peter Brook's production of *Hamlet*, which followed its English tour and Russian presentation with a limited run at the Phoenix Theatre beginning on 8th December, 1955.

Peter Brook is one of the most imaginative of our young producers, whose treatment of *Titus Andronicus*, most rarely played of Shakespeare's tragedies, had set the Avon on fire this season, with Laurence Olivier giving a performance which some thought his greatest since Sophocles' Oedipus in 1945.

It is a pity, therefore, that the Russians should have seen probably the most austere production for which Brook has been responsible; for Wakhevitch's bare grey permanent setting, although sometimes ingeniously used for scene-changes (gravestones rose with grave and stony dignity from the floor, sea-port ropes and chandeliers of candles descended from the "flies"), was bleak to the eye and rather cramping to the action, while neither the Elizabethan costumes nor lighting helped greatly to give life and colour and attractiveness of "line" to the stage.

It is very rare for a Brook production to lack atmosphere, but his Ghost, solidly lit, was a key to the lack of visual poetry in this *Hamlet*. On the credit side he managed a remarkably full text, which included on tour the Norwegian embassies, thus at last balancing the political

aspects of the play and the significance of Fortinbras in the action. The relationship of Claudius and Gertrude (Alec Clunes and Diana Wynyard) was also very well brought out, and helped to atone for a weak and cold Ophelia (the lovely but inexperienced and very self-possessed Mary Ure), and the fact that two promising young actors, Richard Johnson and Michael David, seemed miscast as Laertes and Horatio: the one wept too much for Polonius' firebrand son whose reaction to his father's death is surely meant as a contrast to Hamlet's; and David lacked the sense of an older, more experienced man which seems implicit in Hamlet's line about his fortitude in suffering.

The Polonius was the fine Shavian player, Ernest Thesiger, who spoke beautifully and played the character within the text, without guying; and the Birmingham Repertory and Bristol Old Vic contributed two excellent actors in Richard Pasco and Michael Allinson, both of a quality deserving of much weightier parts than Fortinbras (for which Pasco was surely too sensitive a choice) and his Captain.

With Gerald Flood from the Salisbury Arts Theatre as Rosencrantz, and Harry H. Corbett from Theatre Workshop as First Player and Gravedigger, this production had, in fact, gathered together an excellent selection of talent from English repertory which it curiously failed to use to best advantage. On paper, this looked a very good company; on stage it was strangely uneven, illuminating the play in flashes but without any consistency of style or dramatic glow.

Corbett's Gravedigger, the forty-five years rather suggested in the text instead of the usual septuagenarian (was there a labour shortage for this work in Claudius' Denmark?), was indeed the best of the supporting performances, genial, well in the dryly humorous spirit of the British workman which informs his every line, as earthy as a potato. His First Player, lacking Wreford's superb natural dignity at the Old Vic (where the part was combined with Player King, not the more likely Lucianus), was hampered by a poor wig and the modern method of producing the character as a "ham" who has rather surprisingly aroused the admiration of the Prince (one would have thought Hamlet to be a man of cultural taste and not easily moved by sham heroics). Earlier in the year, rather startlingly, Corbett had been one of 1955's three Richard II's, playing the part as a madman in a Theatre Workshop production which aroused considerable interest in Paris as well as at the company's East End theatre. Another good performance,

by an older classical actor, was John Phillips' Ghost, nobly spoken and mutely touching in the Closet scene, when Gertrude failed to respond to his instinctive gesture of appeal.

The tragedy, more even than usual, devolved upon Hamlet; and it was fortunate in its Prince.

Paul Scofield first played the part at Stratford-on-Avon in 1948, when he shared the rôle with Robert Helpmann. Where Helpmann's was the maturer, more brilliantly Renaissance and emotionally varied performance, the young Scofield held his own with a kind of golden radiance of tenderness, that eschewed psychological disturbances and gave us the "sweet Prince" of earlier tradition.

In essence, his interpretation had not changed; its lyricism had deepened, its technique matured, but the aura was still one of serene inner power, troubled and sensitive to grief, but without the dark demoniac imaginings that charge most contemporary views of the character.

Although this meant some loss of emotional force and climax, most notably in the "Rogue and Peasant slave" soliloquy and the more savage outbursts to Ophelia and the Queen, it was a refreshing return to a more balanced picture of Shakespeare's hero, a Prince of natural grace and sensitivity shocked into melancholia and inaction by a profound sorrow and disillusion.

It was, fundamentally, Gielgud's interpretation, and although Scofield cannot match that great Hamlet's volatility and force of suffering, he did finely convey the distress of mind, the princeliness and final mysticism. He was particularly successful in the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exchanges, showing just the right mordancy of humour and shrewd weighing of character; and he spoke both verse and prose with an instinctive feeling for beauty of sound, subtlety of rhythm and *nuances* of intellect and emotion. Some people found this mannered, as they have found Neville's speaking of verse. The fault to my mind is in the modern "ear", which through listening to consistently bad verse-speaking (it is in London a declining art) has lost its appreciation of the natural stresses and eloquences of rhythm and sound which are demanded by the language of the great classical plays.

Scofield looked the part; a tall, well-graced young actor with long, artistic fingers, his body reveals the glass of fashion and the mould of form even as his lined but attractive face is a mobile reflection of the

thoughts that lacerate the mind of the Prince. This was a Hamlet doomed and tender, growing to maturity and resignation at death; if not the whole Prince, a moving and finely integrated "piece" of him.

It is certainly true that the Moscow success helped to give the company *élan* and confidence, and there was greater harmony of style, as well as more precision and atmosphere in production and lighting, when the play finally reached London. What emerged with increased splendour at the Phoenix Theatre was Alec Clunes' King, a Claudius unapproached by any actor in my experience since Andrew Cruickshank played it in Guthrie's "modern dress" production at the Old Vic in 1938—and with much the same power in suggesting a man of outward charm and force of character, too strong in his ambitions and passions to avoid the crime of murder when it can further them, yet not without conscience and not unsympathetic in his love for the Queen. One of the many subtleties of this performance was Clunes' glance at Laertes' hand on his shoulder, and fleeting smile as he put his own over it in a gesture of sympathy, when the young man weakly clung to him in his distress at Ophelia's plight. In that tiny, secret smile we followed the flash of Claudius' inspiration, as he realised the wax here ready for his moulding.

Mary Ure's Ophelia, though her rather flat, modern little voice is not that of a Shakespearean, became more malleable, truer in feeling and understanding, as the run progressed, and Scofield himself, striking occasionally too hard a pitch of rhetoric on the first night in London, regained the control and fluidity of technique, and the reflective sincerity of grief, that were the foundations of his Prince. The greatness of this Hamlet, in many ways, was its simplicity: its reactions seemed to spring from the situation, and the inner nature of the man. His turn *away* from the Ghost—not at first daring to look at it and leaning against a pillar for support—at "Look, where it comes" was original and yet immediately seemed the right and *only* reaction for this Hamlet; so did the simple gesture of hand to face, bowed with a suggestion of tears, at the Ghost's reference to his mother. "Except my life—except my life" was spoken with telling quietness, as if suddenly struck by the realisation that he did, in fact, long for death (there was a similar note of mortality, later, at the words "perchance to dream"); and the touch of embarrassment with which he met Ophelia and received her offer to return his gifts—a hand fumbling on

the table, head downcast—was curiously natural and touching, bringing the situation right within our experience. Until the realisation of Claudius' and Polonius' presence he was kind to Ophelia—regretful, moved and with a sense of love having to be abandoned for a more urgent and uncongenial task; and this regret seemed to deepen with his disillusion, so that in the play scene it was at *Ophelia* that he looked, with a fleeting expression of sadness, at "As woman's love"—not at the Queen, the more usual interpretation.

The natural kindness of this Hamlet came out still more potently in the moments after Polonius' death; "I took thee for thy better" was a tender irony (Hamlet had giped at the old fool and been irritated by him, but not without the affection of the young ridiculing the old) and Scofield's incredulous look at his sword after the killing was an instinctive reaction beautifully in key with Hamlet's character and the whole interpretation. The consistency of this Hamlet was, in fact, the foundation of its wonderful impression of naturalness and truth, its reflective quality being crystallised in the simple stance with which he stood quietly at the side watching the Player in the "Hecuba" speech—unfussed, unobtrusive, yet silently turning over the possibilities of this material in his mind. The melancholy was unstrained, yet potent through this very simplicity, and this Hamlet died with a haunting sense of the fulfilment of a mystery, and a serene return to harbour after a passage on troubled alien waters.

Repertory Shakespeare: "King Lear" and "Macbeth"

On 19th February, 1956, the Bristol Old Vic celebrated its tenth anniversary. Since 1946, when the historic Theatre Royal first housed a resident Old Vic company, under the invaluable directorship of Hugh Hunt, it has supplemented its illustrious past with a new vigorous growth as a repertory theatre, and some of our best young actors, producers and playwrights have been developed within its walls.

The anniversary production was *King Lear*, this season's only Shakespearean contribution, and both producer, John Moody, and actors rose finely to the challenge. By any standards this was a distinguished *Lear*, far closer to the true impact and shape of the tragedy than the Shakespeare Memorial production with John Gielgud seen in London the previous summer, and also better acted.

Indeed, the general standard of speech at Bristol is a lesson to the London Old Vic, and Moody's smooth-flowing pace and fidelity to the play's structure and text reminded us that Shakespeare was an incomparable dramatist whose emotional force and philosophic content make their most moving impact when unhampered by the textual reshuffles, rewriting and "cuts" (not to count the deliberate misinterpretations) of some modern producers.

Produced on a shoestring in comparison with London financial standards, it looked magnificent. Simply set by Patrick Robertson with darkling skies against which the costumes glowed like Renaissance jewels of black pearl, indigo and saffron, and torchlight fitfully flickered, the momentum was sustained by the fine Lear of a young actor, Eric Porter; realistically old but vigorous in age, lashed with rage, split with anguish, and superbly, quietly intelligent in the grieving moments with the Fool.

If it lacked Gielgud's unearthly pathos, and never quite convinced in madness, this was nevertheless as large a proportion of Lear as we have seen for some years, a crowning achievement of a young character actor who, at the London Old Vic and Birmingham Repertory, has always been able to give a remarkable impression of senility, but tended to monotony in his parts. This performance showed at last variety in characterisation and the power to move and excite.

He was greatly helped by Alan Dobie's Fool, keen under the motley and brilliantly in period and character; and by Moira Shearer's Cordelia, which established this young princess at the start as a true daughter of Lear, inflexible in her own sense of truth, angrily contemptuous of the hypocritical sisters. Here was candid loveliness with a basis of strength, both gentler and noble in the reconciliation. The voice, deepening yet mellow, was now in control, and the performance of this intensely difficult small part showed the dancer had become an actress of rising quality.

John Humphry's Edmund was an imposing Renaissance figure, intelligently probing the psychological surface if not digging too deeply into this evil and flashing mind; Derek Godfrey played Edgar excellently as commentator, although his satyr-like cast of features does not fit the part; Phyllida Law gave classic beauty and edge to Regan; and twenty-three-year-old Edward Hardwicke made a surprisingly real, well-spoken and moving Gloucester.

The Bristol Old Vic is one of our premier repertories, working in a small but beautifully equipped theatre with reasonable resources; but throughout England many smaller repertories boldly tackle Shakespeare on occasion, and the Guildford Repertory in Surrey, which also recently celebrated its tenth anniversary, staged *Macbeth* on 27th February, 1956, as its four hundred and eighth production.

Weekly repertory and a tiny, shallow stage are fierce hazards to Shakespearean tragedy, and this performance inevitably "grew" during the week after a tentative start. But the producer, Bryan Bailey, took the right course for *Macbeth* in a pint pot; leaving his backcloth clear for changes of sky and lighting and confining his scenery to two levels of steps, which helped, in groupings, to mask the lack of players. Within these confines he made some points of intelligence (especially clever was the revolving searchlight on Macbeth's figure which replaced Banquo's procession of descendants), and the action flowed.

The company, young and raw, gathered force during the week, when Edgar Wreford's Macbeth emerged as the performance one had come to expect from this outstanding young actor from the Bristol Old Vic and Birmingham Repertory Company. This Macbeth was noble of features and 'cello-like of voice, with imaginative intelligence behind every reaction; a man with a keen ambitious brain yet driven by a poet's sensibility, and in the end tasting the full bitterness of life in "the way to dusty death".

This type of repertory presentation, with insufficient rehearsal-time and only a week's playing in which to develop the character or deepen its shadows, is a restriction on the player and no great performance of Shakespeare can come from it. The arch of character-development is cut off, as it were, at the end of the week, just as the actor is reaching its apex. On the other hand the experience is a challenge from which our young repertory players learn much for the future, and even in such circumstances an actor of Wreford's experience and training can develop a character with surprising quickness and achieve something like true stature at the end.

Although this, therefore, could only be a preliminary colour sketch of the painting we can expect later, the outlines of Wreford's portrait were vivid and menacing, the face (strong yet finely-drawn with movingly expressive eyes) was strikingly flexible, and the verse-

speaking had clarity, illuminating thought and the right feeling for structure and sound. Already there were intelligent and original features: the progression from vaulting ambition, pierced with irresolution and conscience, to the ferocity of disillusion, the most difficult task of a Macbeth, had begun to emerge; the concentration on hallucination and fear, always a trap for the imaginative actor in the part, had relaxed enough to let the soldier and ruthless tyrant take a place in the picture; and the actor's vitality, severely tested by the pressure of conditions (which included ten performances during the week of this most strenuous of heroic parts), soon asserted itself, strengthened and varied the whole impression.

The subtleties were many, showing both thought and the technique to project them. "This is a sorry sight" was pitiful, and the actor seemed mesmerised by his raised, blood-stained hand throughout the scene; the start at the meeting with Banquo before the murder cleverly suggested Macbeth was already on his way to commit the crime; his face at Macduff's guileless "Is the king stirring?" was suddenly illumined with a poignant consciousness of the murder and its effect on his own soul ("Duncan is in his grave", later, was to restir this ember of bitter regret and world-weariness); the scene with the murderers of Banquo had a curious fellow-feeling, and almost a touch of sadness at the necessity for Fleance's death; but the crime once arranged, he entered like one already weighed down by the care of this new burden, leaning heavily on a table, back to the audience, as Lady Macbeth stung him with "Things without all remedy Should be without regard: what's done is done".

It was here that we glimpsed a new menace; under the lash of conscience this Macbeth became dangerous. Yet "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (the hand before the eyes clawed like a scorpion) had agony, and he caught all the racked imagination and poetic sound of the shard-born beetle speech with its "drowsy hums", the elongated vowel of "sleep" was lingering and exhausted, and light seemed indeed to thicken around this crowned, red-clad figure with upraised hands and haunted, dangerous eyes.

The Banquet scene, though still lacking its full impact of terror and anguish, led the way to renewed defiance: the danger leapt again, deadlier, at "How say'st thou, that Macduff denies our great bidding?"; "but I *will* send" was suddenly ruthless, frightening, and (a fine and

original touch) at "My strange and self-abuse Is the initiate fear, that wants hard use" he caught sight of the stool on which the spirit of Banquo had sat and flung it vigorously down the steps. This would be fine enough; but producer or actor, after "We are but young in deed", pointed Macbeth's still inescapable retribution and despair with his realisation, as he stretched out his hand to his Queen and she slumped unheeding him on the dais, that murder had not strengthened but severed the bond between them, and his loneliness in tyranny was to stretch out to the bitterness of the "sere and yellow leaf" and "troops of friends".

This Macbeth, unfortunately, did not age in the last scenes as one feels Macbeth should (it is a question, realised by most great actors, of *l'optique du théâtre*, a matter of moral decadence, not of years), and "But no more sights!" was hurried into the preceding speech and thus insufficiently pointed. The full ruthlessness and power as the play proceeds had yet to come, although it was already sketched in, with a strong final fight. This tyrant had, earlier, hints of poetic madness but not the crazed rage of the tiger; "Tomorrow and tomorrow", beautifully and bitterly spoken, was not a gleam of lucidity among half-demented desperation but a key to the whole characterisation, the sane disillusion of the intellectual mind. As such it was moving and credible; part of a continuous arc or crescent of characterisation that will one day form a very fine and individual Macbeth. And suddenly at the line, "I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun", the actor grasped, as it were, at the full tragedy of Macbeth, standing at the top of a flight of steps with arms stretched wide and etched against the sky; a magnificent stance at last realising the heroic mould of the part, moving in isolation and despair and seeming to conjure the forces of destiny which pervade this most Grecian in fatality of all Shakespeare's tragedies.

An actor who could follow such a performance, two weeks later, with a richly Dickensian portrait of the Cockney theatrical manager, Jarvis, in *The Lights of London*, at Windsor, must be recognised as an actor of the highest capability and range, and potentially a star in the Paul Rogers tradition: which is what Wreford promises to become.

A splendid and deeply felt Macduff by a resident Guildford player, Dennis Chinnery, helped the Macbeth: his "front to front, Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself", not shouted but breathed out in a deathly intensity, was memorable. This actor, too, will be heard more

of: he has voice, presence, intelligence (I have never heard "Those that Macbeth hath slain", and this whole short scene with Ross and the Old Man, played with so clear a sense of Macduff's groping suspicion); and he is moving without effort. Eileen Beldon gave emotional fire and dominating character to Lady Macbeth, but the disparity of age and style between this long-experienced character actress (her Shaw and Priestley performances will be remembered) and the young company was too marked for dramatic comfort.

What is certainly no longer true, in the English theatre, is that the major companies in London and Stratford necessarily represent the highest all-round standards in acting and production of the classics. It is disturbing, moreover, that these companies seem so disinclined to draw on the mine of good material available in the leading repertories; for both the Birmingham Repertory and Bristol Old Vic have had companies of greater consistent strength and powers of verse-speaking than those which appeared at the Palace Theatre under the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre imprint, and at the Old Vic during the whole of 1954 and 1955. And it is a reflection on the methods of casting in our theatre, and the search for talent, that some of the finest players, on leaving the provinces, remain unemployed on the London stage and are forced into television or back into repertory productions.

Yet one of the problems to be faced every ten years or so by the London theatre is the problem of succession; a new generation of actors must be found to provide the leading players of the future. The actor formed in repertory, with a whole range of principal parts behind him, is the actor at the height of his experience and ready for a wider public and opportunities. At the moment, as much devolves on luck as on talent, and our theatre is the poorer for it. For it is in the centre, unfortunately, that a national theatre is judged, and the work of our leading repertories, though in some cases it does high honour to the English theatre, is too frequently ignored by playgoers and critics alike. Yet it is all part of the national culture and stream, and it has been an aim of this book to include it as such. From this vital current, still, the London theatre must draw its strength, and the perception and degree with which it does so will determine its own future vitality.

X

FROM EURIPIDES TO O'NEILL

Iphigenia in Aulis : Iphigenia in Tauris

GREEK tragedy is a rarity in our theatre. Providing like Shakespeare, magnificent acting parts, it can fire the ambition of an occasional Thorndike or Olivier and thus reach the public stage; but the convention of the Chorus seems difficult to convey satisfactorily to a modern audience and many critics too loosely generalise on the cramping of human will by destiny, without seeming to realise that Fate is an equal ingredient in many modern lives and the Greek heroes and heroines, no less than ourselves, react individually to the predicaments in which they find themselves.

All of us are conditioned by circumstances to some degree, and what evidence have we that these are not predestined? The struggle is still an heroic one, in which Man is by no means always the victor; and the Greeks in their tragedies fought their Fate, or embraced it, with no less humanity in their suffering than King Lear. The downfall of Ædipus and Medea is in their own characters, and can be traced in both cases, if one wishes, along lines of modern psychology: hence their fascination for the actor. And though the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father, for the sake of the wind that will carry his ships to Troy, is something outside our experience in the religious sense, the human emotions aroused are still within that experience, though the sacrifice now would not involve slaying.

It is this great father-daughter theme that illumines the tragedy of *Iphigenia in Aulis* and made the Birmingham Repertory Theatre performance of this play, on 6th October, 1953, so moving and understandable in its impact. There is no record of the play ever having been professionally performed in England, although its sequel, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which Birmingham presented in the same programme, was produced by Granville-Barker at the Kingsway Theatre in 1912, with Lillah McCarthy as Iphigenia. But technically it is the more dramatic and interesting play: Ibsen himself would not have

scorned the trick by which Clytemnestra is persuaded by her husband to bring her young daughter to the Greek camp—the excuse is that Iphigenia is to be wedded to Achilles—and the dramatic revelation of it when she meets Achilles and realises gradually, through an ingenious cross-purpose conversation, that he knows nothing of the matter. And the psychological effect on her of this betrayal and her husband's sacrifice of the girl is not merely potent though brief in this play—it links with Iphigenia's own reaction to the news of her father's murder in the following play, when she shows grief, but *not surprise*. Audrey Noble, as Clytemnestra, and Nancie Jackson, as Iphigenia, both made these points finely at Birmingham.

The murder of Agamemnon by his wife, in Æschylus' splendid and neglected tragedy of *Agamemnon*, is the foundation of world drama: all great dramatists' work owes something to it. And it is equally true that the father-daughter theme of *Iphigenia* recurs again and again in later drama and reflections of it can be seen in *Lear* and *Cordelia*, *Pericles* and *Marina*, even Wagner's *Wotan* and *Brünnhilde*. For Euripides, the religious sceptic of Greek dramatists, challenges Agamemnon's belief in the prophet ("The prophet! What is he?" cries Achilles: "A man who speaks 'mongst many falsehoods but few truths"), but at the same time shows the King as one who genuinely loves his daughter and is torn in his choice between the good of his country and her death. For this reason (Euripides is a great dramatist) the play remains emotionally as well as technically incomparably more dramatic and moving today than André Obey's modern version of the story, *Sacrifice to the Wind*, which was performed on television in a translation by John Whiting soon after the Birmingham Euripides productions, and later produced at the Arts Theatre. There the human conflicts are vitiated for the sake of prolonged ghost scenes with a dead soldier, platitudinously arguing the evil of war, and neither Agamemnon nor (surprisingly) Clytemnestra has obvious scruples about the sacrifice of Iphigenia. But in the Greek play it is the human beings themselves who give life and poignancy to the tragedy, and Agamemnon's agony is an integral part of the theme.

His argument, however mistaken, in the end wins Iphigenia: Greece must never bow to the barbarians, and for civilisation she gives her life. The gentle reconciliation scene between father and daughter when she comes to this decision is on a similar plane of emotion to that of

Lear and Cordelia, and it was exquisitely played at Birmingham by Jack May and Nancie Jackson. May's Socratean figure of the Greek King was in fact a striking impersonation, especially if one remembered his King Henry VI: dignity and power of elocution were humanised in this anguish of decision and gentleness of paternal love (how tenderly he spoke of Iphigenia "tow'rds whom the gentle gales of love Should waft her"). And the picture he made at the opening of the play, bearded and etched against a deeply blue sky, was unforgettably impressive.

The difficulties, for a modern audience, of entering into the Greek acceptance of religious sacrifice are modified in this play by the accent on the human dilemma (as indeed they must have been modified for the audience of Euripides' own day—for these stories were already legends of a time remote from their own civilisation). Iphigenia in the second play, the girl who has been snatched from the altar of sacrifice by divine agency and forced to become the priestess of a pagan king, Thoas, is harder to reconcile yet psychologically a not uninteresting study. Her duty it is to sacrifice all strangers, including Greeks, who land on the barbaric shore of this kingdom: not personally, but through the agency of her servants. Her resentment and bitterness are manifest, and she is altogether an older, more mature, even crueller person than the young girl of the previous play. The two parts, never before played in juxtaposition, present a splendid opportunity for the actress and Nancie Jackson remarkably contrasted the gentle, tender young Iphigenia, low of voice, with the authoritative priestess, still racked with longing for home, in the second play.

Chance blows to this alien shore her brother Orestes, a baby at the time of her own sacrifice and therefore unrecognised by her; and the device by which they realise their relationship (there are similarities, of course, in the *Electra*—*Orestes* plays) is dramatic and moving. Again the scene was beautifully played (by Nancie Jackson and Richard Pasco), with the human touch (brushing the tears from each other's cheeks) which is a feature always of a Douglas Scale production.

These are not great tragic dramas like *Electra* or *Cedipus*; the ending, with Iphigenia rescued from her enforced exile by her brother, under the nose of Thoas, who is deceived by a trick, is happy, and the plot has many elements of the adventure story; but excitement and pathos

are never long absent, and Douglas Seale's stylised and beautiful productions emphasised the humanity while preserving visual beauty.

Certain details stand out still in memory: Iphigenia touching the bowed head of the old servant as she goes out to die; and kneeling at Agamemnon's feet, silently, with her own head lowered, their hands outstretched in stylised gestures, as in a frieze. Occasionally the stylisation (which included Greek profiles, with varying degrees of success, for the entire company) was carried too far: the drama of Orestes' and Pylades' appearance after their fight on the shore was nullified by the fact that their clothes were untorn and perfectly in place, and Achilles too, in the first play, remained immaculate while complaining with some violence of being "o'erwhelmed with stones". Nor did Pasco, as Orestes, though speaking eloquently, ever suggest a man already pursued by the furies of conscience.

But Alan Bridges' Thoas, barbaric as Tamburlaine in brick red with a spiked gold crown, was dramatic and resonant, the quarrel of Agamemnon and Menelaus (Bernard Hepton) clashed as it should, and the scenes between Iphigenia, her father and her brother gave all the lyrical contrast of human affection and human pain. The Choruses were severely cut and broken up between four speakers, led musically by Eleanore Bryan, who also ended the plays as the Goddess Pallas Athena. And the stage pictures always had amazing beauty, from the sea-blue, thick pigmentation (the colour and brushwork style of Van Gogh's Arles) of the sky behind pillared Aulis, to Paul Shelving's striking designs for Tauris with its gold-embossed doors, black and grey columns ringed with gold, and soldiers posed with round black and gold shields. The lighting, as always with Seale, was magical: seeming to bring the scene to life, in the midnight-blue opening to *Iphigenia in Aulis*, from across the long ages of time.

Robert Potter's eighteenth-century translation was used; it was not consistently happy, yet had a certain clear rhythmic eloquence which the fine voices of this company could compass with musical effect. May doubled Agamemnon with the Messenger in the second play, and again his beauty of voice and speech stood out in a nobly-spoken company.

The enthusiasm of the audience at the end of the two performances I attended was a striking tribute, not only to the actors and producer, but to the undying dramatic power of these plays themselves, spanning

two thousand years to touch the hearts not merely of another generation, but another civilisation. For producing them, Birmingham deserves high honour: 1953, which also gave us the three parts of *Henry VI*, was a golden year in the history of this adventurous theatre.

Peggy Ashcroft as Hedda Gabler

Peggy Ashcroft being the acknowledged leader of our serious actresses under fifty, and Ibsen's Hedda Gabler a famous challenge to the actress, it was inevitable that Miss Ashcroft, who scorns casting to type, would eventually attempt the part.

It is always a trap for the unwary to suggest that this actress, the most dew-starred Juliet of our time, might be miscast. Her last Act as Nina in *The Seagull* as long ago as 1936, and her performance in the Russian play *The White Guard* a year or two afterwards, already showed her a potential character actress, capable of a neurotic intensity well removed from the fragile romanticism her looks and personality outwardly suggested. A ruthless yet poignant portrait of a middle-aged dipsomaniac, in Robert Morley's play, *Edward My Son*, consolidated her reputation for tragic range, and her performance as Hester in Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* more recently revealed another unexpected facet of her art: sexuality.

In 1953, in the Stratford production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, her Cleopatra triumphed in a virtuosic display of caprice, royalty and passion, and it became clear that it was no longer possible to think of Peggy Ashcroft as "miscast": she had the great actress's power to mine the gold of her own poetic nature and talent and to melt and beat it into new vessels of superb craftsmanship.

This process she used again as Hedda Gabler: turning her fragile elegance to a deadly weapon, like some delicate but poisonous flower, and filing her own natural sensitivity to a razor edge of dangerous cutting power.

Yet because she is Peggy Ashcroft, she remained feminine too, a creature of fine-drawn nervous sensibility; and by retaining these qualities she made Hedda, while no more sympathetic than the author intended, at least more living and credible, in her high-strung irritations, than the more forceful malevolent portrayals of some of her predecessors. Especially illuminating was the way in which the actress

throughout subtly indicated that Hedda was pregnant, and this shock to her fastidious taste, accentuated by her contempt for her husband, the source of many of her actions.

Like Jean Forbes-Robertson—a magnificent Hedda, not unlike Peggy Ashcroft's in this sense of nervous, irritable femininity—she played a living woman, not a stage villainess, and if her wit lacked Jean Forbes-Robertson's edge of cruel steel, the softer calculation behind it was no less effective on its victims.

What Peggy Ashcroft did convey powerfully, for all her pencil-drawn beauty, was the essence of this woman maddened by provincial boredom, driven by it to the exercising of her subtle power to wound others, and yet without the character to control genius or to break the conventions she internally despises.

Hedda is a creature of hidden sexual fires, thwarted by a cold marriage as well as her natural cowardice. Hence the fascination for her of Lövborg, the weak and rakish near-genius whose reformation by the very ordinary yet affectionate Mrs. Elvsted draws him out of her orbit, and removes her one outlet of experiencing sexual and moral licence by proxy, as one might put it. Yet being a born if twisted romanticist too, she must not merely set her every subtle art (there is something of the Chinese in Hedda's delicate manipulations of torture) to undo Mrs. Elvsted's work on Lövborg—she must burn the MS. which to her is the child of their love, and, knowing Lövborg is still beyond her own power, drive him to a suicide that to her is almost a lyrical fulfilment of her dreams to dominate him.

And here the irony that is always lurking at the back of this magnificently structured play bites out in a last vicious snap of the dramatist's jaws. The "beautiful" suicide of Lövborg is revealed to be the most sordid of accidents in a brothel: and Hedda is spared nothing of the squalid physical details. She is not merely circumvented but trapped; for the triangle that has simmered throughout the play boils to a menacing eruption, and knowledge of Hedda's secret—the provision of the pistol that shot Lövborg—gives the sinister Judge Brack the power over her that he has desired, and her lonely, vaulting spirit evaded.

The threat drives her to unnatural courage, the courage of the suicide; and it was a superb detail of Peggy Ashcroft's performance that her mocking laughter, before she took out the General's remaining

pistol, was still that of a woman exercising her taunting and contemptuous irony on others.

The weakness, if any, of Ibsen's play is that Hedda's personality dominates it so entirely that the other characters—the blind professor-like husband Tesman, the gentle, frightened Mrs. Elvsted, Lövborg, the genius who here can only appear a genius *manqué*—give little scope for the actors beyond character sketching. They were partly miscast in this production, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on 8th September, 1954, and Micheál MacLiammóir's Mongolian-eyed Judge Brack was perhaps a little too much the dandified town "beau", just as Alan Badel's Lövborg was certainly too much the complacent best-selling author, with a seducer's eye still on Hedda—a conception which would have astonished Ibsen, though he is partly himself to blame for providing so little concrete material on which the actor can draw.

The production by Peter Ashmore was good, and the scenery and costumes by "Motley" had a decorative nineteenth-century elegance which, if not perhaps suggesting the stuffy provincialism which stifled General Gabler's daughter, at least lifted the atmosphere of drabness too often associated with earnest productions of Ibsen's plays.

The Wild Duck

John Clements' management at the Saville Theatre followed the excellent new play, *The Shadow of Doubt*, with a revival of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*: a play which is a shining example of dramatic technique employed by a master, yet at the same time so profound a study of the quirks of character behind our moral problems that its chess-like appeal is vitalised with a strong and moving humanity.

For this reason it requires first-class acting from a team of at least six outstanding players, and the Saville production was the second within seven years to employ an all-star cast.

In 1948 Michael Benthall directed a company including Mai Zetterling as Hedwig, Anton Walbrook as Hjalmar Ekdal, Fay Compton as Gina, his wife, Robert Harris as Gregers Werle, Miles Malleeson as Old Ekdal and Walter Fitzgerald as Dr. Relling.

At the Saville Theatre Dorothy Tutin was the Hedwig, a child emerging into the passionate affections and disruptive imaginative experiences of adolescence, and completely unaware of the blunted

adult perceptions which destroy her happiness and her life within a matter of hours. Mai Zetterling's uncomprehending suffering in this part remains moving in memory, but her then strong Swedish accent a little muffled the full effect of her performance. Tutin's was a child *fey* and dreaming: a bookworm warmly affectionate, shy and eager, gazelle-like of movement. She beautifully combined a subconscious awareness of the symbol of the tamed wild duck, and the powerful emotions suddenly racking the heart of adolescence in a moment of loneliness, desertion and grief.

In this performance, as in Ibsen's subtly written part, were concentrated all the obscure dreams and possessive loves of childhood, shattered by the first realisation that dependence on parents and the adult world is something unstable; love and protection will not automatically accompany one through life, and the terrors and loneliness of maturity open like a gulf before the growing child's feet.

Dorothy Tutin's cry of anguish in this moment of realisation was desolate and heartrending. The performance was widely acclaimed and set the seal on her position as the most potent in tragic feeling of all our younger actresses.

Thirty years ago Angela Baddeley was herself a famous Hedwig: now she played the girl's mother, Gina—a wonderful and often underrated character part—with a perfectly judged sense of the woman's warmth, strength and simplicity of character, and her scene at the child's death had an extraordinarily moving dignity.

Emlyn Williams was criticised for overplaying the comedy of Ekdal. But the writing of the part is surely an unmistakable masterpiece of ironic observance, in the Dickensian tradition of witty comment which is Williams' own specialised field. Seeing the performance after the first night, it seemed to me to achieve a sensitive balance between this rich inner vein of comedy and the streak of psychological uncertainty and dependence under the man's selfish vanity.

Ekdal's conceit is an inferiority complex in reverse, and Williams touchingly showed this in his beautifully played first scene of the man's shyness and embarrassment at the Werle party, and again in the flashes of real compunction over the child. The weakness of Ekdal is the weakness of a man, good-hearted at core, who feels himself a misfit in life, unable to sustain even to himself, all the time, the illusion of the importance he longs for. These breaks in the self-woven steel mail of

self-esteem were keys to the genuine understanding of Williams' portrayal.

George Relph as Old Ekdal and Laurence Hardy, from the Old Vic, as Dr. Relling (caustic yet humane commentator on the destructive powers of truth and idealism) were both excellent, but the arresting young actor Michael Gough strangely failed with that impossible, yet curiously fascinating, "man with a chip", Gregers Werle. He was too compassionate, too gentle, for this implacable puritan of social reform, blunderingly trying to reorder human relationships he can himself only dimly comprehend.

The play remains a masterpiece of dramatic geometry (how cunningly Hedwig's coming blindness is woven into the fabric, until Mrs. Sorby's chance remark about old Werle's diseased sight falls like the dropping of a stone into a pool); but its greatness rests on profounder elements. It is an ironic comment on life, and a constant psychological revelation.

The Cherry Orchard

In the Spring of 1953 the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, was occupied by Sir John Gielgud, whose season of three classical plays—*Richard II*, *The Way of the World* and *Venice Preserv'd*—added lustre to the Coronation season. A year later the Lyric renewed its connection with Gielgud, whose production of *The Cherry Orchard* decorated the stage famed in the 'twenties for Sir Nigel Playfair's revival of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Nearly thirty years ago the youthful Gielgud appeared as Trofimov, the "perpetual student", in the production of *The Cherry Orchard* by J. B. Fagan, through whose hands at the Oxford Repertory Theatre some of our best present-day actors and producers passed. Tchekhov, at one time abused by English critics and public, has since then become a firmly established classic on our stages. In the theatre, it is interesting to note how often it is the actors, the workers "within", who are quick to appreciate new dramatic styles, the writer of obvious talent and originality. They lead, the critics (the so-called "literary" men) follow.

There have been, of course, notable exceptions—William Archer's championship of Ibsen, for instance. But Christopher Fry probably

spoke with feeling when in a broadcast on the new move away from reality, and towards poetry and symbolism, in modern stage writing, he said: "The actors are at the very heart of this change. They understand and relish it as much as, or more than, any, and will go to the length of their talent or genius to achieve it."

Tchegov's technique of presenting life in terms of natural character and shifting conversation—irrelevant remarks flung into space, irrelevant moods suddenly breaking like silver moonbeams through the tragic or comic moment—is now old-fashioned, although younger disciples like N. C. Hunter still occasionally practise it. Fry and John Whiting head, with T. S. Eliot, our new "school": and Whiting at least has still to win the critics and public as firmly as he has won the actors and other playwrights.

Meanwhile Tchegov, his moonbeams harnessed to convention, is regularly produced both in London and in repertory: since Tyrone Guthrie's wartime production of *The Cherry Orchard* for the Old Vic there have been three further productions in London, one of them itself by a famous repertory company, that of Liverpool, whose beautifully co-ordinated and acted performances won much praise.

Guthrie's own production was a memorable one, notably acted. Less successful was the attempt of the Bristol Old Vic, in the Autumn of 1953, to present the play in expressionistic settings: only one performance lingers with a suggestion of the true indolent Russian atmosphere, the gentle, wry, distinguished Uncle Leonid of John Arnatt, who had just played the ambitious, nobly graced, very different Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* with the Birmingham Repertory Company at the Old Vic.

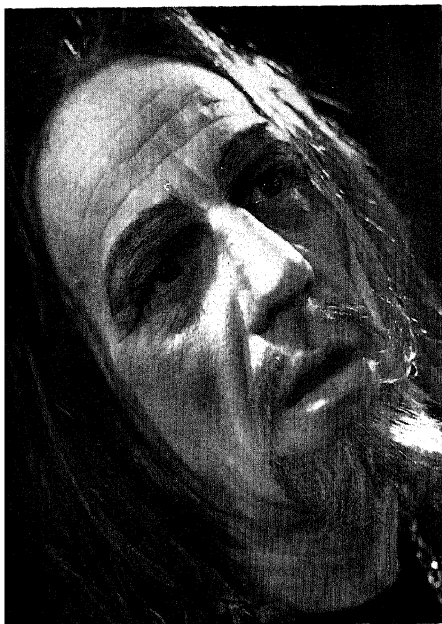
Gielgud's new production put the play back into its realistic Russian setting. There was a new adaptation for which he himself was responsible—more a seeking after the modern and natural term than anything else, though there were a few "cuts" and Trofimov's socialist vision did not burn as urgently as it should. Walter Hudd, in the Guthrie production, was incomparable here.

There was a little loss of literary charm, but after the first night, when the comedy seemed to have more force than the poetry, the performance balanced out. It is right to stress the humour (Tchegov himself did so), but now the sadness, too, came through tenderly, in sudden



Richard II, Old Vic, 1955. John Neville as Richard II.

Houston Rogers

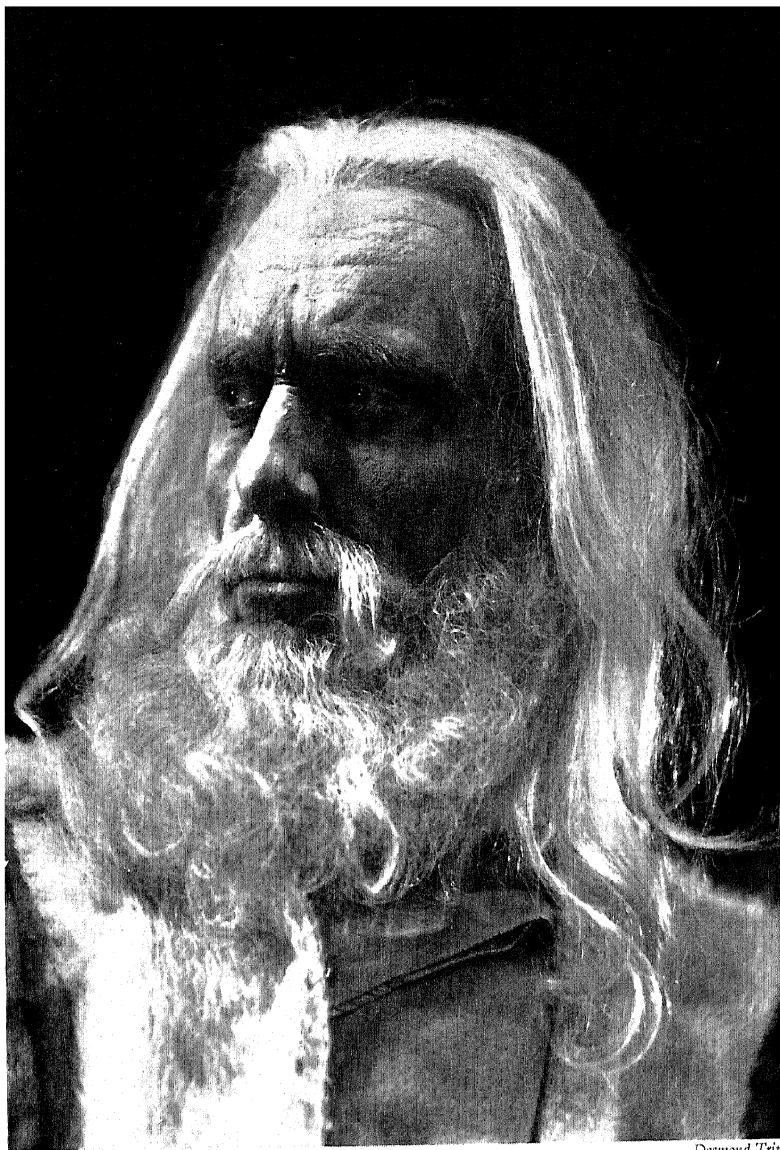


(Left) *King John*, Old Vic, 1953. Michael Hordern as King John. Death scene.

(Below) *Hamlet*, Old Vic, 1953. Claire Bloom as Ophelia.



Angus McBean



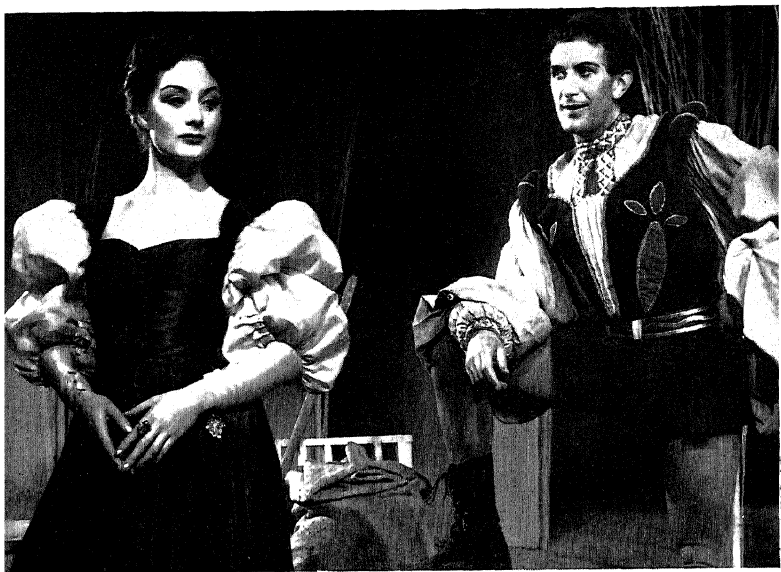
Desmond Trigg

King Lear, Bristol Old Vic, 1956. Eric Porter as Lear.



Angus McBean

Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company, Palace Theatre, 1955. Peggy Ashcroft as Beatrice and John Gielgud as Benedick.



Desmond Tripp

Much Ado About Nothing, Bristol Old Vic, 1954. Rosemary Harris as Beatrice and Edgar Wreford as Benedick.



Angus McBean

Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company, Princes Theatre, 1953. Scene with (centre) Peggy Ashcroft as Cleopatra and Michael Redgrave as Antony. Production by Glen Byam Shaw. Designs by "Motley".

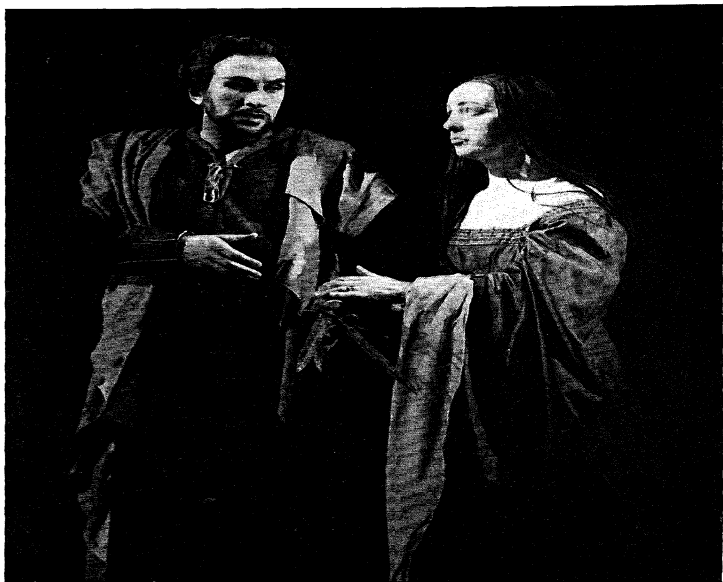


Angus McBean

Macbeth, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1955. Laurence Olivier as Macbeth and Vivien Leigh as Lady Macbeth.



Macbeth, Old Vic, 1954. Paul Rogers as Macbeth and Ann Todd as Lady Macbeth.



Macbeth, Guildford Repertory Theatre, 1956. Edgar Wreford as Macbeth and Eileen Beldon as Lady Macbeth. *Dennett*



Houston Roger



Houston Rogers

The Wild Duck (Ibsen), Saville Theatre, 1955. Dorothy Tutin as Hedwig.



Angus McBean

Hamlet, Phoenix Theatre, 1955. Paul Scofield (right) as Hamlet and Alec Clunes as Claudius.

quietudes of heartache broken only by the twanging of a guitar, the song of birds greeting the dawn.

Gielgud's imaginative touches—witty or human—were innumerable, and although one could remember a few individual parts better played, his team of actors was a good one.

Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies seemed born to play Mme. Ranevsky, on whose warmth, spendthrift generosity and fecklessness the pattern of the play hinges. One believed in her quicksilver changes of mood, the grief that pierced her sudden delights. Esmé Percy, though truly beyond the age for Leonid Gaev, gave an endearing display of affection and misplaced eloquence, Pauline Jameson was a moving Varya, George Howe a delightful Pistchik (that Russian Micawber whose "something" surprisingly *does* turn up), and Robert Eddison the most droll receiver of Epikhodoff's "misfortunes" one remembers. Trevor Howard as Lopahin played finely the key scene in which—a little drunk, half-elated, half-ashamed—he reveals he has bought the estate on which his ancestors worked as serfs. His playing elsewhere needed more contrast.

This was a Russia drawing towards the end of an era; but the poetry of the Slav persists, at least in its dancing, and it was most interesting at the same time as this production to see the Moscow State Dance Company, "Beryozka", at the Stoll Theatre, which showed a team of young Soviet girls of natural charm and zest, flinging themselves into Cossack-style dances but achieving exquisiteness above all in some gliding ensembles of extraordinary beauty and intricacy.

Their coloured dresses touching the floor, they seemed to float footless across the stage: swan-like creatures weaving line patterns of winged smoothness, and displaying a dignity and co-ordinated grace that roused the audience to spontaneous applause. This was something quite unique in England's theatre experience, and a fascinating complement to the different form of poetry to be found in a Russian drama such as *The Cherry Orchard*.

Lorca, Pirandello and O'Neill

The work of the Spanish poet, Federico Lorca, who was killed in the Spanish Civil War, is not widely known in England, although his play, *Blood Wedding*, has been performed twice in recent years: most notably at the Arts Theatre in 1954.

On the surface the tale of an Andalusian peasant wedding, a family blood feud and an eloping bride, its vivid melodrama turns, in the last Act, into a symbolic drama of the cruel forces of Nature, pursuing the hunted lovers with an inexorable blood-lust. Here the verse, somewhat subdued in an American translation, leapt out, and a new young producer, Peter Hall, gave an imaginative choreographic impression of mysteriously moving trees and relentless destiny.

The stark earlier scenes, though slow-moving, are, however, dramatically more satisfying, and Beatrix Lehmann and Rosalind Boxall gave strong emotional performances as a bereaved wife and mother and her prospective daughter-in-law.

The Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet, the previous year, produced an effective ballet version (by Alfred Roderigues) of this play, and its mixture of tragic passion and poetic symbolism lends itself to the medium. In the theatre, too much of the action (including the elopement and fatal fight between the lover and bridegroom) takes place off-stage, weakening the final impact. But Lorca is a dramatist of power and imagination, giving his actors wide scope, and it would be interesting to see more of his plays in this country.

Pirandello, although modern in time, already ranks as a classic in the theatre, and a revival of his *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was produced at the Arts Theatre also in 1954, later moving to the St. James's Theatre, where it achieved a short run: sustained not only by its original use of technical and dramatic tensions, but by a singularly "alive" production by Royston Morley, and a splendid performance, taut in control yet electric in emotion, by Mary Morris as the Step-Daughter.

Pirandello has never captivated the English audience as a whole; but he has a strong hold on the intellect and imagination of a certain portion of playgoers and players, and this vital production made clearer how much the impressionistic technique, elastic in time, of such American dramatists as Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller has derived from his plays.

A third Arts Theatre revival was Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* in 1955, a transposition of the Agamemnon trilogy of Æschylus into modern psychological terms, with an American Civil War setting, which made history at the Westminster Theatre before the war. The Arts Theatre production showed the overlong play to be still a force

psychologically and technically, even though its spiritual values degrade those of the original Greek, and its language, though dramatically apt, is not highly distinguished as prose.

Mary Morris and Mary Ellis, in the parts of Lavinia and Christine Mannon (the Electra and Clytemnestra of the story), could not equal the tragic power achieved by Beatrix Lehmann and Laura Cowie in performances long looked on as definitive; but both gave some fine acting, and a young actor Ronald Lewis, though too broad in the face for such a part, was outstandingly good as the unbalanced and neurotic Orestes.

The Arts Theatre ranges wide over Europe, Asia and America for its plays, and without this small private Club Theatre in the heart of the West End our knowledge of international drama would be even scantier than it is. It is here, in the Tennent management at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in repertory and, more recently, at the Saville Theatre that we must look for such productions and revivals; but they broaden the scope of our restricted theatre, give serious actors dramatic opportunities, and act as an original influence on the young playwrights of today. Their part in the contemporary theatre scene is therefore potent and possibly creative, and must always win respect.

XI

PERIOD COMEDIES

The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker

WE have had comedies about murder; in comparison bigamy is a minor crime, and *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker*, produced at the New Theatre on 18th May, 1955, makes it also seem highly respectable—a mere restitution of geographical rights, a reform (rather illogically) on the same plane as feminine emancipation.

Perhaps it is not insignificant that the author is named Liam O'Brien and refers much to Bernard Shaw. For this comedy has an Irish inversion in argument, and its apparent inconsequence has a disconcerting habit of revealing a serious note. The ending, though happy, is surprisingly touching. The rebellious yet reasonable Mr. Pennypacker both retains his cake and eats it; but not before his habit of putting theory into practice—what his (second?) wife calls being a free-doer as well as a free-thinker—has been condemned by his family of seven children.

The remarkable Mr. Pennypacker, an amiable free-thinker of 1890, has found it inconvenient, since his business takes him equally to Wilmington, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, to lack a wife and family in one of these towns. Twenty years before the play begins, he has therefore rectified this state of affairs in the most obvious and sensible way.

When the play opens his Delaware family is unaware of the position; and only gradually, through the unexpected appearance of a boy from Pennsylvania searching for his father, does it emerge that the seven children in Delaware have seven counterparts elsewhere—equally happy and well-cared-for and the delight of the proud father, who considers his duty to society has been more than adequately performed.

Nor are his arguments, when cornered, without force. He is able, with perfect logic, to bring forward some two hundred million Mohammedans, and rather less Mormons, in moral support, and it is the humanistic argument—the feelings of the wife—which alone

refutes the moral and social one, in the eyes of the kindly bigamist. (The case for a similar polygamous freedom for bigamists' wives does not seem to have occurred to this conscientious free-thinker.)

We leave him uncontrite, but at last a little moved; and perhaps belatedly beginning to learn that though arguments may move mountains, they can never entirely budge the instinctive monogamy and conservatism, and the longing for exclusive affection, in the feminine and infant soul. The Shavian knickerbockers, we feel, may yet be let down into respectable adult trousers.

The happy ending sidetracks moral judgment and therefore is basically unfair. But the play is wittily contrived and written and the production by John Fernald was full of humorous touches. Only the ballet music was anachronistic: *Swan Lake* being unheard of outside Russia until after its first successful production there in 1895.

There were several good performances and some charming children, including the silent Philadelphia sixteen-year-old who wanders through the play like a disconsolate sheep, who has inadvertently discovered fresh fields and pastures new, and doesn't much like the look of them. Mike Morgan played this tussle-head delightfully.

Elizabeth Sellars' lovely looks and Scots sense were charming as the wife, Nigel Patrick's Mr. Pennypacker was urbanely unruffled and benevolent, and Hugh Wakefield, one of our most polished light comedians, made an unexpected appearance as a grandfather to whom he gave humanity as well as irascibility.

Helena Pickard, as the small maiden aunt whose longing for a family to look after is fulfilled, was a perfect period piece which nevertheless touched the heartstrings. This was the happy return of a neat little actress who had been absent from the stage for several years; and it pleasantly coincided with the appearance of her son, Edward Hardwicke, in one of his first leading parts as Florizel in *The Winter's Tale* at the Bristol Old Vic.

The Little Glass Clock

Few new plays of distinction emerged in the London theatre during the early Winter of 1954; but one good comedy was produced in December by John Clements' management, and it proved a scintillating vehicle for himself and his wife, Kay Hammond.

The Little Glass Clock, by Hugh Mills, is a play set in eighteenth-century France, and its obvious derivative in plot and style is Restoration comedy. Yet it evades bawdry of the more offensive kind, and has a humanistic, romantic air sometimes recalling the later dramatist Sheridan. Mills, however, has made no attempt to reproduce period language, and the elegance is one of atmosphere rather than literary distinction. But the phrasing, though modern, is witty, and the plot—a rarity in contemporary comedy—is ingenious and inventive, and remains so to the end.

The little glass clock is the wedding gift given by the Comtesse de Montfort to her bridegroom in the opening scene; and the action manoeuvres around a deferred wedding night while the Maréchal de Sèvres, an admirer of the wife, descends on the château after contriving to order the Comte away on military service. This object is defeated by the Comte's remaining to keep a jealous eye on the proceedings, disguised as a friendly Abbé. But the Maréchal having been disposed of, a similar crisis looms with the King, Louis XV, as prospective lover; and the distraught "Abbé" finds himself promoted to a bishopric, and ordered immediately to Rome, as swiftly as the Comte had been advanced to Generalship and the battlefield.

Meanwhile the true Abbé, a priest with a taste for writing poetry and the dreams of a soldier, has been transported to an earthly paradise by taking the place of the Comte in war council and army movements; and this enchanting part, an off-shoot of Shaw's militant-minded minister in *The Devil's Disciple*, was given a gay and endearing performance by the character actor George Relph. Basil Sydney brought a speaking frustrated countenance and fine diction to the Maréchal. And John Clements acted the bedevilled young husband with his customary grace and humour.

The play, however, was above all a triumph for Kay Hammond, whose entrancing sugar-plum drawl and voice cracked in the ring once so wittily adorned Noël Coward's provocative blithe spirit, Elvira.

She is a born Millament who has never yet had the chance to challenge the incomparable Edith Evans "in full sail". Gabrielle, Comtesse de Montfort, is a minor Millamant of sparkle, and, bewitching in Pompadour panniers, glowing pink and powdered hair, she emerged as an adorable coquette who could yet evade, like quicksilver, the advances of the great.

The play was beautifully decorated by Doris Zinkeisen with Versailles architecture, garden vista and chandeliers, and directed by Clements himself with the wit born of long practice in Restoration comedy. Both production and leading lady had the lightness of a pink *pouffe*, the tinkling charm and elegance of the little period clock itself.

The Rivals : The Road to Ruin

For some reason Sheridan's *The Rivals* is seen more frequently than *The School for Scandal* on our stages. The production with which the John Clements management followed *The Wild Duck* at the Saville Theatre was probably the best all-round in living memory and was jet-propelled in particular by John Clements' own performance of Sir Anthony Absolute.

This irascible old gentleman here became a fiery particle of no more than advanced middle age, carrying himself with aristocratic distinction and shattering the elegance and eminent reasonableness (or what passes in his own mind for reasonableness) only when his will was crossed. Fortunately for our entertainment (and perhaps Sheridan had a prevision of this actor of the future when writing the play), Sir Anthony's will is crossed frequently, and then the upsurge of lava within this far-from-extinct volcano was, as it erupted in a fine spray, a spectacle both awesome and exhilarating.

As an actor of high comedy Clements' timing is impeccable; but it was brilliantly modulated to the naturalness of the rising passion. The effect is one of that complete spontaneity which is a product of artifice made living by art, and Sir Anthony, exploding into life like the fire-work displays so beloved of his age, the eighteenth century, became something more than a comic figure of egoism and temper. He grasped our affections firmly too, as one of life's "characters" who claim our indulgence as well as our exasperation. We did not doubt his intelligence and fondness for his son under the bluster, and his handling of Mrs. Malaprop was a model of tact and amused irony.

Mrs. Malaprop's aspersions of speech no longer amuse, it would seem, our critics. They have lost their first freshness and glow (though surely not for the large proportion of the nightly audience which comes newly to the play?), but to become hackneyed is a penalty only

exacted of the popular, and the inspired ingenuity of some of Sheridan's Malapropisms tends to be overlooked through familiarity.

Meaning is always preserved, but curiously perverted and reversed: it is in this very Irish incongruity that the humour still lies. Athene Seyler, delightful comedy actress and rather "bouncy" Mrs. Malaprop, certainly did not miss her laughs with her nice derangement of epitaphs, and neither did Sheridan. His wit in repartee is, moreover, something as fresh and perennial in its spring-like impact as a primrose. It is not perhaps by accident that the wittiest dramatist since, Bernard Shaw, was also an Irishman.

Kay Hammond, most expert of actresses in pointing a witty line, languished enchantingly as Lydia of that name until laryngitis removed her from the cast. Her part was then taken by the charming Gwen Cherrell, seen not long before as Celia in *As You Like It*, Lady Macduff and a rampageous Doll Tearsheet at the Old Vic.

Laurence Harvey, making one of his rare appearances in the theatre, showed that film work had not robbed him of a gallant stage presence and accomplished style: his elegant Captain Absolute neatly chipped off pieces of the old block in rage, while rightly never attempting to out-explode the older man's seasoned dynamite.

Faulkland is the more difficult part. He is customarily dismissed as a tiresome satire of Byronic self-torturing romantic egoism, but his basis is psychologically real enough (he is not without modern prototypes in his complexities) and Sheridan bites quite shrewdly into the distress caused to others by such obsessions. The portrait could be disturbing, and it needs an actor of quality to keep it on the level of high comedy which the author—perhaps a little ironically—intended. Paul Daneman, refusing rightly to plumb too seriously into the character, gave him exactly the required note of inflated Byronism: a Hamlet *manqué* in black and pale of face, with a splendid way with the speeches which became eloquently, solemnly and mercurially funny.

Of the rest, Michael Medwin, one of our most interesting young film character actors, was admirably cast as Bob Acres, endearing and not too ebulliently oafish; but Peggy Simpson's brittle stylishness is not really quite right for the essentially human and feeling Julia.

Stylised production, with bowing footmen as scene-shifters, seemed to threaten distraction in the first scene, but fortunately fears proved groundless. William Chappell, the producer, kept such extravagances

within the bounds of reality and balance, and Peter Rice's deliciously pretty and mobile sets ornamented, without overpowering, the action.

The young Sheridan, tossing off this brilliant comedy at the age of twenty-three, overshadowed all his rivals in the same century; but Thomas Holcroft's *The Road to Ruin*, though now rarely played, was once popular with actors, and it made an interesting reappearance as the opening play of the Bristol Old Vic season on 30th August, 1954.

The Road to Ruin was what might be termed an interesting archaeological resurrection, thoroughly entertaining as a "well-made" comedy of its period, with no classical pretensions to style. Being highly "actable", it had the advantage at Bristol of giving the measure of the new season's company, and that highly intellectual actor Edgar Wreford in the uncharacteristic rôle of a "sporty" Tony Lumpkin type (a transformation of personality lustily achieved), Mary Savidge as a husband-hunting widow, Michael Allinson (whom one would like to see as Charles Surface) as the charming and disarming scapegrace hero, Bruce Sharman (a very young actor) in a clever sketch of an elderly Jew, and Paul Lee as the surly owner of the traditional heart of gold, showed the range of talent to be impressive. If not the ideal comedy for such a theatre, it justified its revival by its high spirits and acting parts: not all comedies are as lively as this one in these times, or so well-plotted.

Charley's Aunt

On 10th February, 1954, the firm of H. M. Tennent, employing no less a person than Sir John Gielgud as producer, took the classic Victorian farce of *Charley's Aunt*, brushed up and refurbished it in lavish costumes by "Motley", engaged popular screen and stage actor John Mills for the leading rôle, and staged it at the New Theatre, once the scene of Gielgud's early triumphs in Shakespeare.

The settings of Oxford University in the 1880s had the sunlit charm of a series of period water-colours; but the old farce is by no means just a period piece itself—it has the robustness of its genre and played once more to gales of laughter. It has survived because it has the essential of most first-class playwriting—it is well-made in plot and prolific in invention of situation. All modern farce-makers might learn a thing or two from the late Brandon Thomas.

Gielgud kept much of the traditional "business", which lies thick on the play after so many years of continuous performance. But he lightened it with his own brand of wit and period style, and his hand could be felt in the perfect "timing" of the well-chosen cast.

John Mills had great fun with the aristocratic Oxford undergraduate, Lord Fancourt Babberley, forced to impersonate a fellow-student's millionairess aunt from Brazil; and as the real aunt Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies made the most of a superbly unexpected entrance—ravishingly elegant, a witty woman of the world from the poise of her coiffured head to the tip of her expensive parasol. This is an actress who can reveal a wicked amusement in a glance or vocal inflexion. The performance seemed likely to become as much a classic in its way as Edith Evans' Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

XII

FAILURE AND SUCCESS

Someone Waiting : No Sign of the Dove

BY what chance is one new play a London success, while another is so complete a failure that it is booed by a restive gallery on the first night and closes down eleven nights later?

The question is inspired by the treatment of two plays, both by established dramatists, during the last weeks of 1953. The answer seems certainly not because the author of one play is more intelligent than the other, though the verdict may conceivably be based on standards of play construction.

Consider the two plays which were accorded these opposite receptions. *Someone Waiting*, by Emlyn Williams, is an expert "thriller" composed in a conventional drawing-room idiom. It is not a "whodunit" in the accepted sense, for we are very early aware of the murderer's identity. Our interest is in the bringing home of justice to this repellent big-business tycoon, who has strangled a woman in his flat and allowed an innocent boy to be hanged for murder. The instrument of justice is the executed boy's father, who arrives at the flat in the guise of a downtrodden tutor and plots his revenge with the help of the murderer's rebellious adopted son.

Within this situation the dramatist has built up a plot which has genuine tension. The "perfect" plan for revenge goes wrong in detail after detail—older playgoers were busy recalling Anthony Armstrong's brilliant *Ten Minute Alibi* twenty years ago—and several last-minute twists gave a freezing uncertainty to the atmosphere.

Yet, although the growth of ruthlessness in the avenger, as his passion for justice flames into a sense of God-like power, gives a psychological veneer to the action, this is not a play about people at all. It is possible to believe, given a certain amoral streak, that the avenger himself would be prepared to murder an innocent person in order to bring his scheme to a safe conclusion. But it is not possible to believe that he would have found an accomplice with almost equal

lack of scruple. Nor is it feasible that the apparently charming wife of the tycoon, knowing or guessing his guilt, would have remained silent, out of pity, while another man was hanged for the crime. And Adrienne Allen's attractive and emotional qualities as an actress did not convince us that the wife was more than a pawn in the dramatist's game of chess.

Emlyn Williams himself gave a subtle performance, with the tension of a coil of steel and the soft menace of a serpent. But both play and performance lacked that flash of Celtic imagination which gave strangeness to his earlier and better thriller, *Night Must Fall*. Yet *Someone Waiting* grips. It has shape, even if, like the statues of Henry Moore, the shape is bored with implausible holes.

No one could accuse Peter Ustinov, the young author of *No Sign of the Dove*, of shapeliness, either in his own chubby person as an actor or in his dramatic construction. The three Acts of his allegory are as split as the atom. The first is an often witty, acidulous satire of Bloomsbury literary "cliques", set in a ducal home that looks like a harem in a Kafka nightmare. The second is bedroom farce. The third shows this brittle world menaced by flood, while Ustinov's version of Shaw's Captain Shotover (a greater character in a greater play, *Heartbreak House*) thunders like a modern Noah from his Ark at the inundation.

Man, Ustinov propounds at length, is not fit to survive. Let him drown with his self-forged weapons of destruction, while the ancient prophet sails away with the child named Hope. In her alone—if a man resourceful enough to survive the Flood can be found—can humanity relive, and try again.

The fallacy of Ustinov's theme, and its failure to move us, is in the selection of one tiny, intellectual, erotic coterie to bear the burden of the prophet's anger. This driftwood of humanity was hardly worth the submerging. But a good cast, dominated by Miles Malleon (our greatest Molière comedian and at first sight an unlikely choice) as the prophet and Beatrix Lehmann as an eccentric poetess, went under in gallant trim. (Later, at the Bristol Old Vic, Paul Lee's prophet was so nobly spoken, moving and fine that it also deserves recording.)

Not a great play, not even a first-rate one; but the play of an intelligent and experimental mind. On the second and last nights, as throughout the provincial tour, it was warmly applauded.

Ustinov's previous play, *The Love of Four Colonels*, had a phenomenal run. The turn of fortune's wheel in the theatre is nothing if not unpredictable.

Historical Mysteries: "Anastasia" and "The Sun of York"

Anastasia, produced at the St. James's Theatre on 5th August, 1953, is an example of a television success immediately snatched up by a West End management: in this case that of Sir Laurence Olivier, who with Vivien Leigh attended the glittering first night. The play, adapted from the French of Marcelle Maurette by Guy Bolton, was originally produced at the Windsor Theatre Royal, and both the original producer, John Counsell, who runs that enterprising repertory, and leading actress, his wife Mary Kerridge, were retained for the West End production.

Anastasia was the youngest daughter of the late Czar of Russia, reputedly murdered with the rest of her family but in this play, set in Berlin between the two world wars, believed by many to have escaped the assassins. Three plausible opportunists, led by a Russian ex-prince, exploit the situation by producing a girl bearing a remarkable resemblance to the princess, and coaching her in the rôle for financial gain.

But the girl herself, a waif wandering penniless after an escape from a mental home, begins to show strange knowledge of her background, and throughout the play her identity balances on a razor-edge. Is she, indeed, the true Anastasia?

The play gives us to assume as much, no more. It may be said that the progress of the plot is indeterminate and not always convincing, and the superbly constructed and fascinating first Act leads one to expect a better-made play. What a master craftsman like Pinero, one cannot help feeling, would have made of this theme!

Disappointment was at least partly vitiated by the acting of the octogenarian actress, Helen Haye, as the Dowager Empress of Russia, the Czar's mother, and by Mary Kerridge as the girl. Mary Kerridge, a striking and moving actress, has several times attracted London attention; here she suggested unmistakable "star" quality, and her grief filled the stage. Yet like so many experienced and emotional actresses she remains unexploited, and far too rarely seen considering the nature of her gifts.

Anastasia represents only one of the many unsolved historical mysteries of the death of princes. The murder of the young Princes in the Tower is another, and with Laurence Olivier's long-awaited film of Shakespeare's *Richard III* about to burst upon the world, there was a new upsurge in the activities of those who believe the true character of our last Plantagenet king to have been very different from that which Tudor propaganda painted.

In May 1955 the Salisbury Arts Theatre presented the first performance of the late Gordon Daviot's play *Dickon*, a work which emphasised the noble nature of the King already presented in her popular detective novel, *The Daughter of Time*, written under the pseudonym of Josephine Tey. In October the same year a mother-and-daughter dramatist team, O. and I. Wigram, were responsible for a similar view in *The Sun of York*, produced at the Royal Court Theatre only three days after a dinner to honour Richard's birthday (2nd October) was given by the White Boar Society at his London home, Crosby Hall.

Josephine Tey, following Richard's biographer, the historian Sir Clements Markham, presented a plausible and fascinating theory that Henry VII, Richard's supplanter, was responsible for the murder of the Princes in the Tower, a crime necessary to validate Henry's own slender claim to the throne and unscrupulously fastened on the dead and dishonoured young king.

The Wigrams doubt the Princes' survival into Henry VII's reign, but follow an also plausible theory that they were spirited away without Richard's knowledge by his arch-enemy Bishop Morton, whose ambition could only be fulfilled by the placing of Henry Tudor on the throne. One of these Princes, it is believed (and indeed it was believed at the time for many years afterwards), survived to become the supposed "pretender", Perkin Warbeck, executed later in Henry's reign.

In both cases Richard emerges—and there is much in contemporary historical records to support it—as a leader of outstanding courage, ability and integrity: a young man outstandingly loyal to his brother Edward IV, and a commander and king of such justice that when he died by treachery at Bosworth Field, the devotion of his Northern subjects was expressed by the Town Recorder of York in a spirited protestation of grief: "On this day was our good King Richard piteously slain and murdered, to the great heaviness of this city."

Richard's true story is a strange and exciting one, with an element of unsolved mystery which makes fascinating a complex character. There is scope in it for a psychological study as dramatically absorbing in its way as Shakespeare's flashing and ironic monster, built wholly from Tudor propaganda.

Unfortunately neither *Dickon* nor *The Sun of York* achieve that study: as intent on propaganda for Richard as Shakespeare was against, they have sentimentalised the King into a figure sympathetic and disinterested yet never thoroughly vital, lacking the force of character and spiritual conflict which one feels even "good King Richard", a man with a ruthless family and period inheritance, must have possessed.

Yet within its limits Richard in *The Sun of York* is a good actor's part, perhaps too unfairly compared with Shakespeare's Machiavellian presentation of a totally different character. He was given a moving performance by Leslie French—once sweetest of Ariels to John Gielgud's Prospero—whose range of feeling surmounted to some extent the fact that he was basically, even disastrously by historical standards, miscast.

The political side of the Wigrams' play was far better written than it was given credit for, and an over-black Morton was presumably necessary to their theory (nevertheless, this most secular of prelates and schemers could have been more interestingly drawn). It had some of the technical defects of the "chronicle play", which is out of fashion nowadays, but it held the interest of any to whom history must always be a matter of living personalities.

Cases of Murder

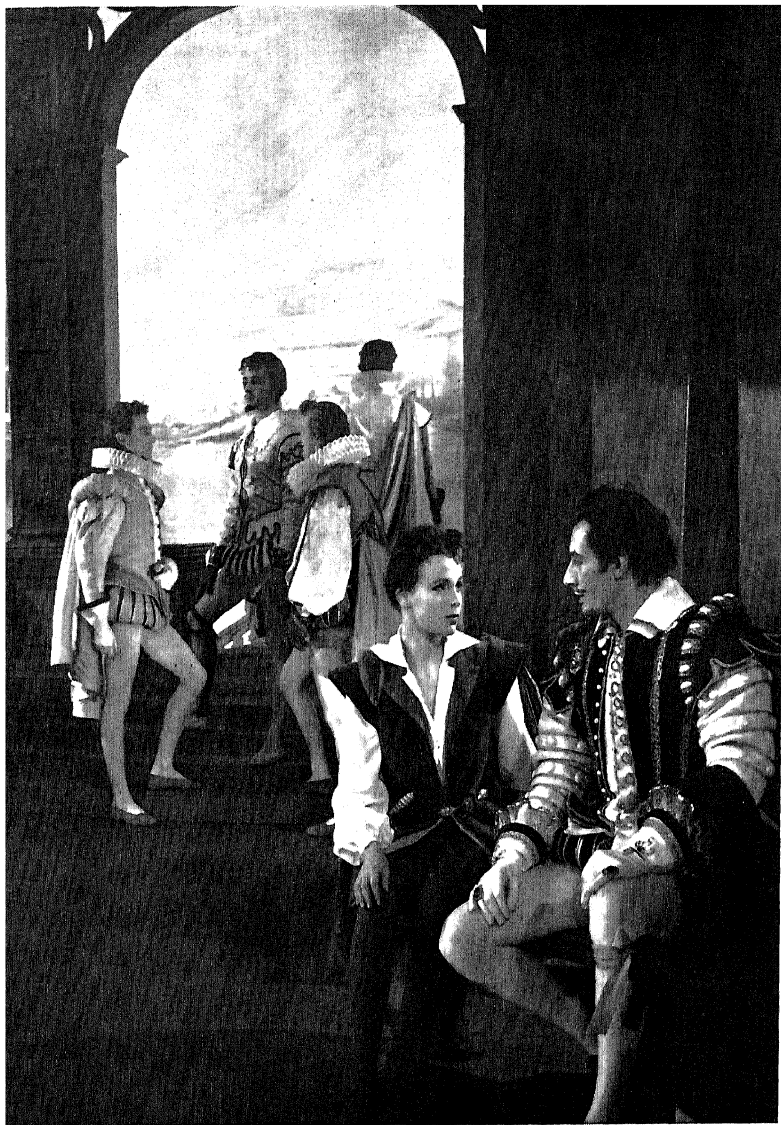
It is said the detective novel, as opposed to the "thriller", is declining in popularity; but not since the palmiest days of Edgar Wallace in the 'twenties has there been such a hat trick as that achieved by Agatha Christie, mistress of the genre, in 1954, when three of her plays were running simultaneously in the West End. *Spider's Web*, with film star Margaret Lockwood, at the Savoy completed this hat trick, although *Witness for the Prosecution* (a much better play than either this one or the sensationally long-lived *Mousetrap* at the Ambassador's Theatre) left the scene soon afterwards.

In *Spider's Web* Miss Christie frankly plays for laughs; the murdered man dies neither loved nor regretted, and a kind of hilarious hide-and-seek ensues between the police, the body and the inhabitants of the country house (complete with secret panels) where the murder takes place. The identity of the murderer comes as no great surprise, and the first Act is slow; thereafter the entertainment, though slight, gives no cause for regrets.

Margaret Lockwood, returning to the stage after a long absence, showed more flexibility of face than voice and failed to touch off the few moments of warmth of emotion. But with the kind of voice used by Vivien Leigh in comedy she amusingly managed the part of a woman so naturally addicted to tall stories and romanticising that when she is speaking the truth no one believes her. Margaret Barton, an actress approaching thirty, gave one of her remarkable studies of childhood, in this case a schoolgirl with uncontrollable hysteria, and the veteran actor Harold Scott stood out in an otherwise rather routine West End cast.

The centrepiece of *Witness for the Prosecution* is the trial of a young man for murder at the Old Bailey, a scene which ensures some drama and a documentary fascination. It is a cunning piece of work with a startling "double-cross" ending, and a fine part for the leading actress. Both in London and New York this was acted by Patricia Jessel, a handsome young actress who once played Lady Macbeth with Donald Wolfit, but here achieved her first West End success. As the enigmatic German wife of the accused man she had mystery and emotional power, and her performance in New York won her a critical award.

Yet Agatha Christie's plays, as mysteries, are never as accomplished or plausible as the best of her novels, and less well-known dramatists sometimes write better, if less publicised, murder plays. One of these seemed to me *No Other Verdict*, by Jack Roffey, which had a promising run cut short early in 1954 by England's spell of Arctic weather, which hit many theatres hard. It had a good idea and ingenious construction, the action swinging in a multiple set from murder trial to the events leading to it, and it was acted by an excellent small team. Elsie Randolph, Jack Buchanan's leading lady in many musical comedies of the 'twenties and 'thirties, returned to the stage in a rather nebulous part; but Richard Leech gave an intelligent performance as a man



Angus McBean

Twelfth Night, Old Vic, 1954. Claire Bloom as Viola and John Neville as Orsino. Setting and costumes by James Bailey.



Angus McBean
The Duenna (Sheridan-Slade), Westminster Theatre, 1954.
 Jane Wenham as Donna Luisa and Denis Martin as Don Antonio.



Lisel Haas
Iphigenia in Aulis (Euripides), Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1953.
 Jack May as Agamemnon and Nancie Jackson as Iphigenia.

wrongfully accused of murder, and there was a beautiful piece of suave and sympathetic acting by John Arnatt, as a detective in the invidious position of a friend of the man in the dock.

Terror of a different kind stalked the stage at the Westminster Theatre in *Dead On Nine*. This play by Jack Popplewell is not a "whodunit" but in the line of tradition of Anthony Armstrong's classic *Ten Minute Alibi*, and the successful *Dial "M" for Murder* previously at the same theatre. One knows the murderer from the beginning: the play hinges on the wheels of justice and some clever twists of plot which sweep on to an ironical ending. The characters are, for a play of the kind, trenchantly observed: hard, but psychologically driven to evil, rather than practising it for sheer gain or the dramatist's machinery. It is a play of spite and human incompatibilities turned to something more destructive, and the expert cast—Hy Hazell, Maurice Kaufmann (another product of the Old Vic School), Griffith Jones and Andrew Cruickshank—acted it with heartless incisiveness. A delightful small comedy performance by Anthony Snell as an effete unwitting intruder helped to lighten the tension.

The Lighter Stage

If murder in the theatre is a matter of hit-or-miss in success, no less is true of comedy and farce, which overwhelm the West End theatre but have their damp squibs no less than their triumphant fireworks. From a heap of material I select three plays which remain in mind for some distinctive quality of acting or theme.

William Douglas Home's *The Manor of Northstead*, a sequel to his successful *The Chiltern Hundreds*, combined the same formula of party politics and an engaging nitwit elderly Earl: the Earl of Lister, now guest in the home of his erstwhile butler and maid in the most remote constituency in Scotland (the Isle of Whisk).

The Earl was a part-creation of the author helped by the octogenarian actor A. E. Matthews, a character with a fund of aimless stories ("I knew a fellow once . . .") whose ludicrousness was in their lack of point, and which stage rumour (supported by the expressions of his fellow actors) suggested were freely interspersed with extempore dialogue as the performance proceeded. The plot is just funny enough to get by; but the Earl's the thing, and Matthews' amiable meanderings

and pot shots at distant seals seemed rightly likely to survive our brief summer, chill autumn and long, long winter.

A gift from New York which monopolised Her Majesty's indefinitely, *The Teahouse of the August Moon*, proved a fantasy of unexpected charm about American troops sent to plant the flowers of progress in an oriental community, but succumbing quickly themselves to the pleasant, lethargic customs of the East. This was certainly a change from the American "musical", then with us in its most efficient and strident form in a show about an unpleasant but acrobatic night-club spiv, *Pal Joey*, and although the acting was uneven and there were several changes of cast during the run, the serene performances of the lovely Chin-Yu as a native girl, and of Wolfe Morris as an elderly oriental, cling to the memory more vividly than some of the principal male acting parts.

More topical fare was *Both Ends Meet* by Arthur Macrae, a farce (the programme misnamed it a "comedy") on the fantastic problems created by modern income tax and some equally fantastic attempts at evasion. This proved as light and acceptable (to a soured and over-taxed audience) as a meringue and was helped by first-class comedy acting; the author and Brenda Bruce being supported richly by Miles Malleon and Alan Webb, triumphant leaders of English senile character comedy, who drew two elderly aristocratic tax-evaders with a flourishing Topolski-like pencil.

A unique entertainment (although both Joyce Grenfell and Ruth Draper, of incomparable character range, have made London appearances during the years since the Coronation) was *An Evening with Beatrice Lillie*, which was an enormous success in New York and the run of which was considerably extended at the Globe Theatre in 1955. The inimitable Miss Lillie, one of the few genuine women comics who, like Cicely Courtneidge, are not afraid of appearing absurd, was in scintillating form, and both in the sketches of the first half and the solo songs of the second her famous mauve fez surmounted a personality composed equally of dynamite and charm. Among the sketches, one in a theatre dressing-room, and *Kabuki Lil*, an irreverent impression of a Japanese Nō Play, provided an astonishing range of eccentricity and split-second timing. The songs included many old favourites, and Constance Carpenter and Leslie Bricusse, a promising newcomer, supported loyally in the sketches.

XIII

THE RISE OF THE BRITISH MUSICAL

Slade and "Salad Days"

OCCASIONALLY in the English theatre a star of the first magnitude is born; but very rarely is that star a composer, able to divert public acclamation away from the actors and achieve the distinction of seeing his own name, rather than theirs, in the press advertisements of the play.

This heady rocketing to fame has been experienced by Julian Slade, a composer in his early twenties originally attached to the Bristol Old Vic. His music for Sheridan's operetta, *The Duenna*, showed a talent for melody and wit; the play moved into the Westminster Theatre on 28th July, 1954, and hardly had the cheers subsided when another Bristol Old Vic musical production, *Salad Days*, with its composer at one of the two pianos, reached the Vaudeville Theatre and hit the headlines with a success probably unparalleled since Noël Coward's *Bitter Sweet* and Ivor Novello's *Glamorous Nights*.

Slade is, indeed, the obvious candidate for the place left vacant by the death of Novello. Yet he is not in that direct tradition. His shows (he is part author of *Salad Days*) are not in the old-fashioned, sumptuous musical comedy manner, but are distinguished by their economy, style and originality. And the same applies to his prolific dancing tunes, which have sentiment rather than sentimentality, and a wit and variety of rhythm that put them closer in style to Sullivan.

Slade is not a musician in the class of Sullivan, but as a melody writer he has many similarities. In *The Duenna* especially there is a hint of actual pastiche; but *Salad Days* makes it amply clear that his fecundity and tunefulness are creative, not derivative. He can include syncopation without becoming limited to the jazz idiom. His tunes, like all the best tunes, are outside time; and (their special distinction) a fountain of happiness that seems never in danger of being turned off.

This fresh and natural air of happiness, in a world where even musical comedy and revue reflect something of Freudian anxieties, is

perhaps the quality above all others that has brought *Salad Days*, and Julian Slade's music, to such triumphant success. Real light-heartedness, in romance and melody, is rare enough on our stages to count as blazing originality. And many would like to believe that *Salad Days* is itself a reflection of a new optimism in today's youth.

Its thread of plot concerns an artless little romance between two young ex-undergraduates, and a magic piano which brings joy to them and others by making all hearers dance away their troubles. This thread is cunningly wound and maintained through a number of scenes of a revue-like character, with extremely funny skits on *haute couture*, flying saucers, hush-hush foreign diplomacy and night club life (the "Cleopatra Night Club" scene must have been especially potent at Bristol, where the same company had recently performed Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*).

How on earth, playgoers may ask, did such a show come into being at the Bristol Old Vic, centre of Shakespeare and serious modern plays? The answer is that under the direction of Denis Carey the Bristol Old Vic made a habit for some years of producing a musical show at Christmas; a proposition made easier by the resident talent of Slade as composer, and of the actress Dorothy Reynolds as librettist and lyric writer, who shaped their material to fit the personalities and acting gifts to hand. *Salad Days* was a "Summer" show of the same nature, intended as a gay finish to the 1953-54 season. It was seen by an acute West End management, and transferred lock, stock and barrel to enchant Londoners. No one was probably more surprised by its triumph than its cast of Old Vic actors, who must have been amused and gratified to find themselves achieving fame in so unexpected a medium, instead of (as fully anticipated) spending months on and off the dole.

There was, indeed, only one true singer in the cast: Eleanor Drew, drawn in as guest to play the charming heroine. But the entire company, by sheer freshness of attack, put over the songs with disarming naturalness, and there were brilliant and witty individual character sketches by Newton Blick (ex-Shakespearean comedian), Dorothy Reynolds (ex-Madame Ranevsky), Michael Aldridge (ex-Othello) and Yvonne Coulette (ex-Cleopatra).

There was a real "find" in Bob Harris, who mimed a dumb lad; James Cairncross put over his "Cleopatra" number with urbane

style; and the fair young hero was played, with a delightful touch of wistful humour, by John Warner, who was in the film *The Cruel Sea*, and in the Coronation *Henry VIII* at the London Old Vic achieved a notable "double" as the senile Cardinal Campeius and the harassed little Cockney porter ("I'm not Samson!") trying to control the crowds in the Christening scene.

The Duenna was Sheridan's only operetta. Like *Salad Days* originally produced at the Bristol Old Vic, with vivacious period-style melodies by Julian Slade, it later had a success on television and was played at the Westminster Theatre by many of the original Old Vic and television cast. The bright stylised Spanish settings were by Tom Lingwood, and the production by Lionel Harris was in the famous Nigel Playfair tradition with eighteenth-century musical plays. Outstanding in the cast were Joyce Carey as the Duenna, Gerald Cross as the Jew Isaac Mendoza (both wittily timed studies in eccentric comedy), and the ravishingly pretty, clever and sweet-voiced Jane Wenham, an Old Vic actress who about this time made an interesting screen début in Priestley's *The Inspector Calls*. Denis Martin (her tenor lover), Joan Plowright (soprano-soubrette) and Elizabeth West (dancer and choreographer) gave her charming support, with David Bird as the most explosive of fathers, and Victor Maddern as a laconic servant, to quicken the comedy of this gay, funny and elegant eighteenth-century revival.

A third Julian Slade show, based on Shakespeare's early trifle *The Comedy of Errors*, reached the Arts Theatre in March 1956. Again the tunes had style and spirit, the musicianship a lively ingenuity (most of the lyrics were merely musical variations on one Shakespearean line), and enchanting expressionistic settings and Regency costumes (which were, of course, Grecian in derivative) were designed by Hutchinson Scott. Again, too, Lionel Harris produced, and Jane Wenham as Luciana acted and sang, with wit. The voices otherwise were not really adequate, but there was some excellent acting: Frederick Jaeger and David Peel made handsome and elegant figures of the Antipholus twins, David Dodimead spoke up finely for Ægeon, and a young acting discovery, Bernard Cribbins, doubled the Dromios with a nice distinction of character and comedy effect.

"The Boy Friend" and Others

The new-style British musical, which gained such popularity through *The Boy Friend* and *Salad Days*, sustained a temporary hiatus through the failure of *The Burning Boat* after a week's run. This was put on at the Royal Court Theatre, and had an original and appropriate background theme—a music festival of the kind which is now regularly held in Devon and similar counties during the summer months. Its brief romance between a young married woman and a visiting violinist did not, however, end happily as in the case of the normal musical play: the wife recognised the need of her misfit husband, a non-singing rôle played by the fine serious actor, Michael Gough, and in itself something outside the musical stage tradition.

Perhaps these things, as well as a rather divided "press" and lack of conspicuous vitality in the musical and dramatic treatment of the theme, account for the quick failure of the production, in spite of charm of presentation and the presence of such distinguished players as Gough and Marie Ney. But coming at the same time as the highly successful American musical, *Wonderful Town*, with Pat Kirkwood, and such a film as *A Star Is Born* with the dynamic Judy Garland, it did point the moral that a fashion for quieter, more elegant British musicals cannot in itself guarantee success.

Another comparative failure was *Wild Thyme*, produced in the summer heat-wave of 1955 but charming many with its unusual style and witty Ronald Searle designs. This was a piece of pastoral nonsense with a touch of real absurdity and originality in its production (by Wendy Toye) and settings. Donald Swann's music was also acceptable, though without the clinging quality of Julian Slade's tunes, and the performances of Denis Quilley (a most attractive new personality of great charm and virility, with a good baritone voice), Colin Gordon and Jane Wenham deserved a better success. Quilley, whose experience also includes Shakespeare, later went into *A Girl Called Jo*, a musical version of Louisa M. Alcott's *Little Women* and *Good Wives*, which although less original than *Wild Thyme*, and not critically well received, caught on at the Piccadilly Theatre for a reasonable run.

It is difficult to gauge within a hair's breadth the reasons for theatrical success or failure with the public; quality in itself is by no means always enough, especially in these days of high costs, when few managements

can afford to " nurse " a show through its first difficult weeks, if success is not immediate.

These reflections were aroused especially after a visit to *The Boy Friend*, which had just celebrated its five hundredth performance at Wyndham's Theatre, in addition to becoming the " rage " in a slightly Americanised production in New York.

I missed this show when it was originally produced, but I do not think the performance itself had probably deteriorated. The *éclat* of its 1920s fashions and setting—at a time when this period has begun to wear an air of romantic nostalgia—had obviously had a great deal to do with its triumph. So had Sandy Wilson's vivacious period tunes, more especially in such numbers as the two Charlestons and South American Tango. The dance routines of John Heawood are absolutely authentic and were sparkingly rendered.

But as a pastiche or even burlesque of the musicals of the 'twenties the work seemed to me surprisingly weak. Wilson's rather " silly " plot and lyrics may be faithful enough; but the whole style of the production and acting, though perfectly sustained throughout, belongs more to the arch Three Little Maids from School (1885) epoch, with a French maid who must have passed out with *The Quaker Girl* in 1911.

Probably the most enchanted audiences at this play—like the author-composer—are too young to remember *No, No, Nanette*, *Sunny* and other popular musical comedies of the 'twenties and early 'thirties, and to them the stylised coyness and affectations of *The Boy Friend* acting seem both funny and quaint. But the point about the Bright Young Things was that they were Bright, *not* Coy; these shows, apart from their gay tunes, nearly always had a front-rank comedian (missing entirely from *The Boy Friend*) and lots of incidental comedy. *The Boy Friend* is strangely unfunny (the laughs raised when I went could be counted on one hand), although the romance was charmingly played by Anne Rogers and Anthony Hayes, and there was a zestful soubrette-dancer in Denise Hirst. The outstanding performance in style, though, was that of a French head-mistress by Joan Sterndale-Bennett—who played " straight ".

Do the modern generation really believe such players as Jack Buchanan, the Hulberts, Binnie and Sonnie Hale, Jessie Matthews, Bobby Howes and other musical comedy stars of the 'twenties and 'thirties were anæmic and affected in style? The answer, of course, is

that they were dynamos of energy and fun, and as "modern" as the young people in *Salad Days*. But *Salad Days*, to my mind, keeps its freshness because of its core of good character-playing, with a cast from serious "Rep." and sketches and lyrics of wit. It creates its own style, instead of burlesquing an imaginary one.

After the Ball : Wedding in Paris

Noël Coward, London's favourite playwright of the 'twenties, has remained a national figure without repeating, in the post-war world, any of his brilliant early successes. His film, *In Which We Serve*, remains his finest achievement in recent years: his theatrical flair seems to have waned.

In 1954 he made a belated attempt to repeat his success in operetta, crowned by the enchanting and tuneful *Bitter Sweet* of 1930. But instead of relying on his own creative gifts, he fell back on the Tennent management's regular standby, Oscar Wilde, and used *Lady Windermere's Fan* as a basis for his new musical play, *After the Ball*, produced by Robert Helpmann at the Globe Theatre. The trouble with this was that *Lady Windermere*, in her original condition, had already been revived by Tennents in a lavish production by John Gielgud, with an accomplished cast including Isabel Jeans, Roland Culver and Denys Blakelock; and the famous epigrams in this and other Wilde plays (all dressily produced in recent years) have begun to wear thin.

For the plays apart from the now fading wit little can be said: Wilde wrote one masterpiece, the evergreen farce *The Importance of Being Earnest*—immortalised in modern revivals by the fabulous Lady Bracknell and John Worthing of Dame Edith Evans and Sir John Gielgud—but his more serious plots creak with Victorianism, without exhibiting either the talent in creating a "well-made play", or the sense of character, that established Pinero as a much better dramatist.

Lady Windermere's Fan exhibits Wilde's usual *femme fatale*, in this case sacrificing her reputation (though it is rather obscure what reputation still remains to be sacrificed) for the sake of the virtuous daughter who does not know her identity. Mary Ellis, an actress from serious drama as well as Ivor Novello's musical plays, did her best for this Mrs.

Erlynn, who seems ingenuous enough to hope that attending balls sheathed in skin-tight black velvet, with a striking Jane Russell *décolletage*, will persuade the best Edwardian circles to reaccept her in society. But she tended to heaviness of attack, and her charm lacked the lighter elegance that a more experienced actress of period comedy could give.

The same, to a higher degree, might be said of most of the rest: chosen for musical comedy gifts, rather than the right acting style, the cast inevitably failed to make the best of Wilde. Nor were they entirely successful with Coward, the singing being poor—this applying even to Vanessa Lee, Ivor Novello's "discovery" who looked beautiful and poised but sang too loudly, off pitch, and with a frequent "wobble". It is only fair to add that the audience seems to prefer its musical comedy singing that way.

The exceptions were Irene Browne as the Duchess of Berwick, who could speak a Wilde line to perfection; and a charming newcomer, light as thistledown, named Patricia Cree, who spoke her sole repeated lines—"Yes, Mama", "No, Mama"—with a demure innocence that captivated the audience, and finally, blossoming like a delicate white flower, danced her way into their hearts with will-o'-the-wisp grace. In this she was partnered admirably by Graham Payn, who is an Australian. So, too, is the producer, Robert Helpmann. Perhaps this is why Coward "wrote up" the part of the Australian, Mr. Hopper, into a "lead" for Payn, and embellished Wilde with many quips—often admiring and sentimental—about Australia, including Payn's nostalgic song, "Faraway Land". By the end, even the most patriotic Australian must have felt this particular "party line" was becoming a little overworked and embarrassing.

What of the tunes and lyrics? The former were curiously unmemorable and nowhere matched the real charm and originality of those in *Bitter Sweet*. The latter were conventional except in the various concerted numbers, which mainly occurred as interludes outside the plot and did contain some of the wit and rhyming ingenuity that distinguished Coward's best revues. "Oh, what a century it's been", and the bright trio, "Why is it the woman who pays?", did much to revitalise the flagging action.

Doris Zinkeisen's sets and costumes were in her usual fresh musical-comedy style, and Helpmann did what he could with the production,

although the ball scene, devoid of big dances and ensembles, gave him disappointingly few opportunities.

An equally conventional English musical was *Wedding in Paris*, notable, however, for a brilliant "come-back" by Evelyn Laye after a number of years of neglect. Her triumph was a triumph of experience as well as personality: once again, in the theatre, it was demonstrated—as it had been demonstrated by Gladys Cooper in the serious play, *A Question of Fact*—that the actress who has thoroughly learnt her job, in a long hard school, is the actress who matters, and whose charm and technique can survive the impact of mere years.

Plays for Christmas

Plays for Christmas customarily have music, though like pantomime they come into a different category to the "musical" proper. A rather special example in 1954 was the Players' Theatre revival of one of the genuine early Victorian pantomimes by Planché, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*.

This, produced in authentic period style including a Harlequinade, proved a refreshing change from the increasingly sophisticated adult form of pantomime, in which Perrault's original fairy stories have been largely lost. It stuck to its story, had much early-Victorian fun in the matter of puns and rhymed couplets, and showed us, in the character of the Baron Factotum (Great-Grand-Lord-High-Everything) the source from which W. S. Gilbert drew the fabulous Pooh-Bah (Lord High Everything Else) in *The Mikado*.

The Players' Theatre itself is a long-standing feature of London theatrical life, its atmosphere being that of the Victorian music-hall in which coffee, sandwiches or more stimulating fare can be consumed in the auditorium, while the regular audience shouts the expected responses to the Compère or joins in the music-hall songs. Don Gemmell in recent years has succeeded the celebrated Leonard Sachs as a robust Compère, and was also responsible for the production, and the playing of the King, in *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*.

Hattie Jacques, both opulent music-hall "turn" and regular Good Fairy in the Players' annual pantomime, inevitably put one in mind of Gilbert's amply proportioned Queen of the Fairies in *Iolanthe*; but the best individual performance was that of the Wicked Fairy, Fairy

Baneful, by Annie Leake—a brilliant piece of burlesque spite, not without the clown's true touch of hurt pride and pathos. Jane Wenham, who recurs like a decimal in British musicals, sang charmingly as the somnolent Princess, and Denis Martin, who had been with her in *The Duenna*, was her pleasant Prince.

For the children, to replace the dwindling pantomimes, there is now a rich selection of children's plays, often a far more delightful entertainment for the young, who like their humour wrapped in a genuine story.

Peter Pan, a hardy annual, was brightened in 1954 by a much-needed new production by John Fernald, which restored the long-absent lagoon scene and, while not moving too far from tradition, gave the children's psychology a necessary lightening and overhaul. But more interesting, because less regular, was the revival of the once-popular *Toad of Toad Hall* by the company of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, where it had been performed for several Christmases in succession, although the last London production of the play was before the war. Its return to the Princes Theatre was an obvious first-night success, although surprisingly the play did not reappear the following Christmas.

A. A. Milne's adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's much-loved classic, *The Wind in the Willows*, delightfully captures the spirit of the book, and all the first scenes, in which we are introduced to Mole, Water Rat, the self-important Toad and kindly "schoolmaster" Badger, are entirely enchanting. The play sags a little in the middle, perhaps needing more music, and the Trial scene is not on the same level of invention as that in Carroll's *Alice*; but all ends well in Toad's escape from prison and triumphant return to Toad Hall—as bumptious, unrepentant and disarming as ever, and soon, one feels, about to repeat his motoring offences.

The play lives as a juvenile classic because, as in *Alice*, the animal characters are recognisable human "types", and it is therefore a glorious opportunity for "character" acting.

The four chief parts in this revival were beautifully cast. Leo McKern was a Toad of true buoyancy, with india-rubber facial expressions which alternated between self-glory and abasement. William Squire (the previous season's Menenius, Aguecheck and Horatio at the Old Vic) had a bewhiskered, pert-faced briskness as Water Rat: a

twinkling-eyed and engagingly ironic performance. Brewster Mason had the right "weight" and kindness for Badger. And Edward Atienza, the next season's Feste at Stratford, gave Mole a humble and wistful charm which was wholly captivating. The production was by John Kidd, who played in a number of Stratford productions of *Toad of Toad Hall* and later gave some excellent character acting at the Bristol Old Vic.

These are not musicals in the ordinary sense, but music is a recognised part of them and they take their place, no less than *Salad Days* and sometimes more lastingly, in the recognised tradition of our lighter musical stage. Revues, purely topical and therefore ephemeral, can never be revived, and the smash hits from America—from *The King and I* to *Kismet* and *The Pajama Game*—take our stages in a rich yet curiously alien succession. *Peter Pan* and *Toad* survive them all, in spite of increasing eccentricities of casting in the case of Barrie's boy hero; and the new life infused into the British musical by *The Boy Friend* and *Salad Days* may, we hope, outlast these particular shows and bring back a continuity of British tradition which will balance the American influence and provide individual creative ground for our singers, comedians, librettists and composers.

XIV

OCCASIONS

Stage Jubilee: Sybil Thorndike

IN June 1954 Dame Sybil Thorndike and her husband, Sir Lewis Casson, set out on a tour of Australia and New Zealand, which was followed by a more unusual itinerary through India. Their recitals of poetry and scenes from plays gave these people of far-off lands some idea of their integrity as artists and Dame Sybil's emotional range and depth, which have made her the undisputed "tragedy queen" (and a by no means minor princess of comedy) in fifty splendid years on the stage; but they could give only a small indication of the value of the work of these two players, not only within the theatre, but in the support of many human and social causes, in the raising of the moral and æsthetic status of the stage, and in the spreading of that spirit of generosity, loyalty and family affection which has made them beloved of the public and their fellow players.

Their send-off was a triumphant one: for 14th June, 1954, marked the fiftieth anniversary of Sybil Thorndike's first appearance on the stage. Her last performance in *A Day by the Sea* at the Haymarket Theatre, before her Australian tour, therefore took place on that date, and on 31st May an All-Star Matinée performance at Her Majesty's Theatre, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and Princess Margaret, was given in combined honour of her Golden Jubilee and that of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

"All-Star" celebration performances have a habit of assuming unsatisfactory piece-meal characteristics, in which no one is seen long enough or at his best. But in this case the items from plays were restricted in number, to the great benefit of the whole dramatic impression. Inevitably there was some occasional miscasting: neither Alec Guinness nor James Donald, as Sir Peter Teazle and Joseph Surface, seemed quite at home in the screen scene from *The School for Scandal*, in which Vivien Leigh, however, repeated her Gainsborough-beauty Lady Teazle and Paul Scofield gave a brief dazzle to Charles.

Act I from Oscar Wilde's *The Ideal Husband* hung fire, in spite of the galaxy of stars in "walk-on" parts: but this was mainly because Wilde's lesser works have been overdone on modern stages and his epigrams (and even more his plots) have begun to take on a wilted air. In the only modern creative effort, Gladys Cooper and her son-in-law, Robert Morley (who wrote the sketch) provided a gay informality; Dame Edith Evans opened the proceedings with an entrancingly warm and witty reading of A. P. Herbert's Prologue; and Sir Laurence Olivier ended them with the apt Epilogue from Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.

The great set-pieces of the afternoon, however, were the last scenes from *The Winter's Tale* and the scene of Queen Elizabeth I's death from Clemence Dane's *The Lion and the Unicorn*, a play which C. B. Cochran meant to stage for Dame Sybil but which never appeared owing to his death.

The Winter's Tale, produced by John Gielgud, had the advantage of the three leading players (himself, Diana Wynyard and Flora Robson) who had appeared in it at the Phoenix Theatre in 1951. Simply set in tones of grey and black, its scenes of Leontes' remorse and reconciliation hushed the fashionable audience to a strange raptness. Once again the beauty of Diana Wynyard as Hermione's supposed statue exquisitely graced the scene, and Gielgud's Leontes, silver of hair and voice, had an unparalleled music and pathos which seemed to have found an even deeper and more moving note with the passing of time.

Like the same actor's Prospero, this was a performance not quite of this earth; its magic amazingly unobscured by the piratical black eyepatch in which, owing to a temporary injury, the actor was forced to play. The acting shone through, and doubtless non-Shakespeareans in the audience accepted Leontes' missing eye, undisturbed, as an obscure but necessary part of the plot!

But this was really Sybil Thorndike's afternoon, and her acting of Elizabeth not only illumined what seems to be a notable piece of writing, but struck to the depths of human character and emotion in a way only this actress can. This ravaged yet indomitable figure, haunted by the past, a great queen still in death, set the seal on a career which has already laid its foundations in English stage history.

The presentation of a statuette of Sybil Thorndike as Saint Joan, unforgettable portrayal of her younger days, marked the end of her delightful performance in *A Day by the Sea*, and she readily, volubly

and with characteristic enthusiasm broke the historic Theatre Royal, Haymarket, tradition that no after-curtain speeches should be made from the stage. The same night the B.B.C. honoured her with another "all-star" performance: *Henry VIII*, with herself as Queen Katharine, Gielgud as Buckingham, Ralph Richardson as Wolsey, Vivien Leigh as Anne Bullen, Robert Donat as Cranmer and Olivier in the tiny part of the Porter which he played with Sybil Thorndike in 1925.

Sybil Thorndike would be the first to acknowledge the simple and serene assistance of Lewis Casson throughout, and most especially in *A Day by the Sea*, where his acting had a beautiful subtlety few actors of our time could match.

In Memoriam: Dylan Thomas

The death of the young Welsh poet Dylan Thomas stimulated a number of poetry readings and performances, which although not strictly theatrical come definitely into a dramatic category. This is because his last work, *Under Milk Wood*, specially written for broadcasting, is labelled "A Play for Voices", and requires trained actors and actresses for its satisfactory performance.

The B.B.C. Welsh team of actors read extracts from this at the Royal Festival Hall on 14th February, 1954, in a Memorial programme in which the stage players Sybil Thorndike, Emlyn Williams, Peggy Ashcroft and Michael Hordern, and the poets Cecil Day Lewis and Christopher Hassall, also took part, reading poems by Thomas and others. Two weeks later the Old Vic staged a Sunday Reading of *Under Milk Wood* in full, with several of the original team supplemented—brilliantly—by Sybil Thorndike and the Welsh-born Emlyn Williams and Richard Burton.

Obviously, had he lived, Dylan Thomas might have become the major poetic dramatist for whom we have been waiting. *Under Milk Wood*, the narrative of a day in the life of a Welsh village, has the teeming and essentially comic characterisation of a Dickens, laid on with a Rabelaisian bawdiness that recalls the Restoration stage. Yet unlike the plays of Congreve and Wycherley, *Under Milk Wood* is rural, not sophisticated. The roots of its robust outspokenness are in the earth, which explains the flash of lyricism in the poet's restless, evocative quest for words.

One looks in vain for tragedy (sentimentality seems the most the

writer can achieve outside the sensuous, the lyric and the comic) and the characterisation perhaps in this sense has limitations. But the characters live nevertheless, and the Old Vic rocked with laughter. Sybil Thorndike played with superb wit and edge; Burton, low-voiced, caught some of the evocative poetry of the wonderful descriptive opening; Diana Maddox brought a pleasing gentleness and warm charm to the local enchantress; and Emlyn Williams was a delight, reminding us of his virtuosic and justly famous dramatic readings from Dickens (in 1955 he was, in fact, to add a Dylan Thomas programme to his solo recitals).

It is of Dickens that one thinks, again and again, in Thomas' earthy characterisation and turns of humour. His death is the stage's loss, even though he never lived to write for it.

Tenth Anniversary: The Bristol Old Vic

On 19th February, 1956, the Bristol Old Vic celebrated its tenth anniversary. Only ten years later the Theatre Royal, in which it performs, will have been in existence for two hundred years; built in 1766, it is England's oldest theatre still in use, and nearly every great British actor and actress has acted within its elegant green-and-gold-leaf tiered walls.

Edmund Kean, Sarah Siddons (whose ghost, some say, still walks), Irving, Macready, Grimaldi, the youthful Kate and Ellen Terry—these were its visiting "stars" or resident stock company players. Maurice Barrymore, father of Ethel, Lionel and John, held his wedding reception on its stage. It has known the highest and the lowest; Shakespeare, pantomime and, before its Arts Council renaissance in 1943, when the citizens of Bristol responded to an appeal to buy it and preserve it as a theatre, the shadier aspects of low-town music-hall.

An Old Vic company, headed by Sybil Thorndike, reopened the theatre on 11th May, 1943, in *She Stoops to Conquer*; but this was only a touring company, and it was not until 1946 that Charles Landstone, to whom the Bristol Old Vic owes so much, finally won over the Arts Council to his vision of a permanent branch of the Old Vic attached to the Bristol Royal. Hugh Hunt was the first director, and the opening production on 19th February, 1946, was *The Beaux' Stratagem*. Pamela Brown, William Devlin, Yvonne Mitchell and

Noel Willman were among the members of Bristol's first resident Old Vic Company.

Hunt's revivifying and creative régime lasted until 1949, when he came to London as director of the Old Vic Company at the New Theatre. The plays produced ranged from *Hamlet* to the Soviet play, *The Apple Orchards*, and from *King Lear* and *Macbeth* to *Winterset* and *The Circle*. He was succeeded, for a season, by his assistant, Allan Davis, and the years 1950 to 1954 saw another brilliantly successful period under the directorship of Denis Carey.

It was under Carey's encouragement and active assistance that Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds began to combine their talents in the creation of musical plays, which succeeded the pantomimes favoured at Christmas by Hugh Hunt (Widow Twankey in *Aladdin* had been Paul Rogers' first resounding triumph with the Bristol Old Vic). Their first production, *Christmas in King Street*, opened on 24th December, 1952, and led the way to the later successes, *The Duenna* and *Salad Days*.

It was in these shows that Jane Wenham, a varied dramatic actress of Hugh Hunt's period, developed her singing voice and enchanting musical personality. Dorothy Tutin, Robert Eddison, Paul Rogers, John Neville, Paul Daneman, Laurence Payne, John Kidd, Donald Sinden, Catherine Lacey, Pamela Alan, Rosalie Crutchley and Nigel Stock are among the players, now well known in the London theatre and films or on television, who have played with the Bristol Old Vic. Cyril Cusack acted Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* there with Wendy Hiller as his Pegeen Mike. Rosemary Harris willingly abandoned the West End career begun with *The Seven Year Itch* in order to learn more about her job in serious repertory when, in the 1954-55 season, she played Beatrice, Hermione, Portia and, most exquisitely, the heroine in Giraudoux's *The Enchanted*. The following season Moira Shearer courageously and intelligently did the same thing, with Cordelia, Yelena in *Uncle Vanya*, Sabina in *The Skin of Our Teeth* and another Giraudoux heroine, Ondine, among her parts.

Measured against the continuity of the theatre's historical tradition, the Old Vic-Arts Council régime can only seem an interlude. Nevertheless, something of contemporary significance is being forged: new names which may one day have their own place in theatre history, a spirit of team-work and sustained achievement that has already brought a sense of continuous growth, with firmly planted roots, into a building

which had seen only the inconstant blaze of starlight and the artistic ups and downs of the touring system.

The record of plays, classical and modern, has been a distinguished one, and the interchange of dramatists, actors, designers and producers between Bristol (which first nourished them) and the London Vic and West End has already enriched our theatre. The Old Vic interchange, to the advantage of both theatres, works in both directions; in 1954 Edgar Wreford came from secondary parts at the London Vic to be leading man at Bristol; the following season Eric Porter (who had already played at Bristol earlier in 1954) came from the Waterloo Road back to Bristol. The process, and its fertilising influences, might be likened to a theatrical rotation of crops.

It has always been a policy at this theatre to combine classical and modern plays, both by foreign and English dramatists, and Denis Cannan is one of the young playwrights who owed a first production of a new play (*Captain Carvallo*) to the Bristol Old Vic. John Moody, who succeeded Carey as director in 1954, has made modern plays a keystone of his policy. Peter Ustinov wrote a play, *The Empty Chair*, specially for production at this theatre in 1956, and Moody's "first productions" have included not only new plays by Cannan, Howard Clewes and Angus Wilson, but the first English presentation of Arthur Miller's sensational *The Crucible* and plays like John Whiting's *Marching Song* which have reached only a limited intelligent audience in town. The choice of plays has not always been wise, and there is a definite danger of intellectual preciousness; but few would deny that the basic policy is a healthy and potentially creative one.

The increasing lack of serious plays, requiring the serious type of trained actor, put on by West End managements is a grave danger to eventual standards of acting as well as drama. It is in organisations such as the Bristol Old Vic that the actor can learn to expand his range in the highest-quality international drama, and here, too, the playwright can hope to see his serious plays staged and acted by a company of high standard.

New Theatre Venture : The English Stage Company

London itself, on 2nd April, 1956, saw the opening of a new theatre organisation which may challenge the provincial repertory theatres as a centre of creative development.

The small Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square is famous in theatrical history as the scene of Granville-Barker's presentation of plays by Shaw and Galsworthy and his revolutionary experiments in simplified Shakespearean production.

It is the first of these activities, the encouragement of new plays by intellectual writers, that the newly-formed English Stage Company, under the artistic direction of George Devine, is intended to emulate, and although it is early to gauge its eventual stamina and success there can be no doubt it has already produced some stimulating creative material, and brought to London notice not only plays hitherto known only to the provinces but a contemporary young dramatist of exciting potentiality.

Angus Wilson's *The Mulberry Bush*, which was chosen as the company's first production, had already been presented at the Bristol Old Vic some months before, and in spite of some rewriting the impression it made was still one of a keen literary talent as yet not fully at home in the medium of the stage. But the second play, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (also already seen at Bristol), and the third, *Look Back In Anger*, a play by a totally unknown 26-year-old actor-dramatist, John Osborne, created a remarkable impact and put the company at two bounds into the front rank of influential theatre groups.

Miller's striking play on the Salem witchcraft trials in Puritan Massachusetts, with its contemporary political parallel which, if ignored, still leaves a play of distinction and dramatic force, had a more vivid production, as has been described earlier in this book, at the Bristol Old Vic, where Patrick Robertson's thunder-skied, gibbet-haunted setting and the acting of Edgar Wreford, Rosemary Harris, Perlita Neilson, Michael Allinson, Paul Lee and others achieved a supersonic emotional impact and made credible the picture of a community driven to mass hysteria by superstition and the evil human will.

Devine's hospital-white stage, simple but not very imaginatively so, was too clinical in its effect for the same degree of dark superstition to emerge; the outbursts of the "possessed" children seemed calculated in this atmosphere, and in the slacker pace plausibility weakened. The elimination of the rich character of the venerable Giles Corey also damaged the humour and humanity of the play, although this was restored some time after the first night at the author's own request.

The Court Theatre's gain was in the Abigail Williams of Mary Ure, a young actress who here showed a new and remarkable power of emotion, sensuality and twisted psychology—the innocent flower, Botticelli-like in beauty, barely concealing the writhing serpent of evil under it. Rosalie Crutchley's quiet Elizabeth Proctor was also immensely fine, and Michael Gwynn's sympathetic John Proctor tenderer, though less strong-fibred and tormented, than Wreford's at Bristol. Devine's own harsh, obstinate-willed Judge Danforth dominated the latter part of the play, adding conviction to the blindness of justice, although this was easier in that the rest of the male company was certainly not up to the necessary strength. Joan Plowright's half-witted and terrified child, Mary Warren, and Rachel Kempson's bereaved Puritan woman, also made an impression.

Osborne's bitter, invective-ridden, superbly witty and stinging play is something in the nature of a virtuoso performance. The invective flows from the mouth of a young intellectual, Jimmy Porter, whose only panacea for frustration in a squalid attic is a monologue of abuse and self-pity largely directed at his worn, silent young wife. The corrosive that binds these two, love on the razor-edge of resentment and hate, is caustically indicated: an unusually frank penetration into the nature of certain marital relationships, unbreakable yet exhausting.

It is a picture of contemporary youth at its most disorganised, egoistic, cruel and dissatisfied, without causes to fight or beliefs with which to fertilise its barren psychological soil; unlikeable, unhappy, with enormous capacities of intelligence running to waste, and a psychopathic background the dramatist does not plausibly or deeply enough develop.

But it has the sharpness of a Scythian blade and (which our older, ivory-towered critics have been Christianly too charitable to realise) the sting of truth: these people are alive and of our time, however disagreeable the indictment of society may seem. When the foment of his anger has subsided and his focus on life broadened, Mr. Osborne may mature into a dramatist of considerable intellectual dimensions. In the meantime, his is the most striking talent to emerge since John Whiting's.

He was superbly served by Mary Ure as the wife, a performance of still patience and inner strain, flaring at long last into a quivering agony. Kenneth Haigh's bravura performance of Jimmy was perhaps too little

astringent and self-tortured, too pleasant and open of face, but Alan Bates as the uncouth but serenely enduring Welsh friend was quietly admirable. The wit of the play was much overlooked by critics and helped to carry it to triumphant success: Osborne has something of the Shavian dazzle of mind with which to gild his bitter pill, and it may well in the end strike him a universal path of laughter through the theatrical jungle, and save him from the cul-de-sac of a purely intelligentsia triumph.

Ronald Duncan's two verse plays in a single evening's bill, *Don Juan* and *The Death of Satan*, represented the antithesis of *Look Back In Anger* in moral values. Finely played by Keith Michell as Juan and Rosalie Crutchley as Donna Ana, they arouse more questions, human, religious and metaphysical, than are yet dreamt of in young Mr. Osborne's philosophy. They are the older generation's challenge to the mixed-up-kid mentality of today, turned in on itself and psychologically shattered by the introspection, without spiritual roots or the instinct for self-sacrifice, materialistic as reason insists yet chaotically disturbed, not tranquillised, by the age's acceptance of the rational.

The winds of heaven are scattered, though perhaps not obliterated, by the keen blasts of reason: they will return, Mr. Duncan suggests, even if only one man preserves them in Hell. Outwardly his picture of modern society, which scandalises even Don Juan in a brief return to earth, is as depressing as Mr. Osborne's: more so, in that it is thinly satirical and not pierced, as in the younger man's play, by the genuine anguish of living. But it clings to the intuitive religious instinct of man and propounds a moral basis in life: it accepts that humanity was meant to have a soul and the destruction of the soul is a matter for despair.

Unfortunately, though the works of a maturer mind, the plays lack the savage wit and theatrical dynamism of Osborne's performance: Wilde, Shaw and the Devil, boring each other in Duncan's Hell, are dogs who have had their day and show it, and the urgency that in Osborne's case draws sparks, like a well-wielded flint, off the jagged rocks of modern youth (even though, as a line in his play wisely suggests, it is only one section of modern youth) is missing in the theatre. We are mentally absorbed, impressed, but not swept, as we are swept by Mr. Osborne, appalled and lacerated into the arena.

Don Juan and *The Death of Satan*, nevertheless, were worthy this

company's production and show the breadth of intellectual outlook of the directors. But the outstanding achievements have been the bringing of Arthur Miller's play to London and the discovery in the first season of a dramatist who at one blow can jerk attention to the newest contemporary outlook and the youngest dramatic talent. This three years' survey of the theatre can end on greater hope than was possible at its beginning. The next generation of playwrights is on the move, and at last there is a theatre in London open to them.

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